

THE LAND OF THE TWO RIVERS

THE LAND OF THE TWO RIVERS

BY

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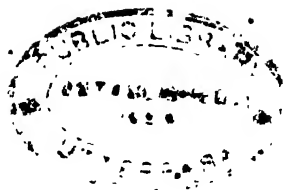
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PREFACE

THIS little book does not aim at setting down anything new or serving purposes of reference, like a textbook or an encyclopædia article. My object has been rather to do in writing what one might do in conversation, if anyone casually put the question: "What as a matter of fact has Mesopotamia stood for in the past?" The country which we incorrectly call Mesopotamia and the countries connected with it—Armenia, Asia Minor, Palestine, Persia—have recently become associated with living interests of the hour and immediate questions of practical politics; that may seem a reason for trying to give a fresh rapid survey of what their significance has been in former ages. Their past stretches out through a long procession of centuries; if these are to be flashed before the mind of a reader in the space of an hour or so, one is obviously confronted with the dilemma of either so crowding together details that the whole becomes a dry rehearsal of unfamiliar facts and names, or, on the other hand, of dropping

essential things out of the picture. I have tried to seize the main points and leave out all details which did not contribute to making them apprehensible. No more proper names of persons and places have been introduced than seemed strictly necessary. I have supposed myself addressing someone with no special knowledge of ancient history beyond those general notions attached for everybody to Greece and Rome and certain familiar Bible names.

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THE LAND OF THE TWO RIVERS

I

THE "UNCHANGABLE EAST"

FEW catchwords have more misled popular opinion than that of "the unchangeable East." One can see how it arose, that relative truth in it which made it plausible. It is true that the poorest stratum of society in all countries—those whose life is mainly filled with the satisfaction of the most primitive needs, getting food out of the ground or out of the waters, keeping their bodies warm and dry—remains wonderfully uniform from age to age. (Or perhaps one should say "remained"; for modern civilization, far more penetrating than any previous one—with popular education and motor-ploughs and cinemas—is affecting the life of the poorest in all European countries as it has never been affected before.) The different characteristics which in different regions mark the tillers of the soil and the fisher-folk of sea and river and lagoon have been largely caused by special physical conditions in those regions, which are permanent. It is true that the traveller to-day in Egypt may see the *fellahin* using various simple processes

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which were used by their fathers three thousand years ago, and the traveller in Babylonia* may see on the rivers and canals rafts on inflated skins, like those described by Herodotus. If he talks to the people of the land, their outlook on the world may strike him as like that recorded in parts of the Bible. And the traveller, it may be, comes home declaring that the East never changes. But, if so, he forgets that this life of the cultivator and fisherman and hand-labourer has been in the past the substratum only beneath changing civilization, the basis for the life which thought and wrote and made poems and pictures and statues, which reared great monuments and works of public use, which designed great schemes of law and government. And it is what man has achieved in these lines which gives their character and their interest to the civilizations of the past. In Italy, too, the traveller in some out-of-the-way country regions can still, or could till recently, find a primitive plough in use like that described by Virgil. It would be a mistake, for that reason, to talk about the "unchangeable West," as if the Roman civilization which had been erected upon the basis of that

* It has become common in the English Press to use the word Mesopotamia to indicate the alluvial region between the lower reaches of the Euphrates and Tigris, of which Baghdad is the capital. This is not according to the usage of antiquity; Mesopotamia, for the Greeks and Romans, was the more northern country (in Arabic the Jezireh) nearer the Armenian highlands, a country of undulating grassy plains. The southern country where our troops have been fighting they called *Babylonia*; its Arabic name is *Irāk*. In this survey Mesopotamia is to be understood as *not* including Babylonia.

old Italian country life counted for nothing. The difference between Italy and the East is that here the vision of the traveller is so occupied with the manifestations of a still living and changing civilization, the child of the old Roman, that there is no danger of his thinking that the relative constancy of Italian peasant life through the ages means that in Italy things are as they always have been. But if our modern civilization had perished and the tillers of the ground in Italy continued to follow their ancestral ways, then perhaps some traveller who had seen ancient ploughs depicted on vases or bas-reliefs, and saw the like still in use, might think of the West as simply this sort of thing indefinitely drawn out. In the East the old civilizations *have* been destroyed. What the traveller there sees of them to-day is the sordid relic—the shreds and remains. He does not always apprehend the difference between the East that he sees and the East that was. He sees the same sort of boats being used on the Tigris as were used two thousand years ago. And he comes home saying the East never changes.

II

THE PROGRESS OF MAN

THE life of the creature Man upon this planet in the Solar System, we cannot tell to what it is moving; we cannot tell the full ultimate meaning of the story, because we are only part of the way

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through with it. This is not the place to inquire whether the story will be characterized by progress up to the end, as Victorian optimism seemed to take for granted, or whether a time will come when the main movement upon this planet will be, not ascent, but decline. So much, however, we can say—that the movement hitherto, taken in its entirety, disregarding partial and local arrests and retrogressions, has been a progress. Even this statement has to be guarded if it is to keep wide of controversy. There are people disposed to doubt whether the average amount of happiness or of goodness among civilized man is greater than that among the men of the Stone Age. But there is one respect in which progress is unquestionable—in knowledge and in power, in that command over material Nature which goes with knowledge.

This progress till recently had not been so much a continuous advance as an advance by stages, at each of which the forward movement appeared temporarily to have come to a standstill. The advance in knowledge and power was conditioned in a large degree by an extension of the means of communication, because the things which each individual man by himself can do are small; and the larger the number of men whose work can be co-ordinated for common ends, the greater and more complex are the things which human effort can do. At the beginning man could communicate with man only by speech and gesture; the next stage was marked by the invention of writing; the next that of printing; the next by those vast new

possibilities of communication brought about in our own time by steam, electricity, and petrol.

And it is to be noted that the periods of time between the different stages of advance grow shorter with each stage.

The period during which mankind had no means of communication but speech and gesture stretches back into an incalculable number of centuries. Had an immortal visitor from some other world visited this earth at intervals of a thousand years, he might have inferred that this creature, living and breeding in caves and forests, and fighting the other animals with weapons of chipped stone, but with the peculiarity that he could communicate his desires to his fellows and concert plans by the medium of articulate sentences, had reached the term of his development. A thousand years have gone by, so many thousands of times the sun has traversed the sky above mountains and forests, deserts and seas, and the creature man is still what he had been before, the generations living the same life in their little huddled groups or roving hordes, a movement and shifting of races that pass without a memorial. Another thousand years, and no essential change. And so on, millennium after millennium. Nay, there are parts of the human race which have changed but little even up to our time. The Tasmanians, when discovered in the eighteenth century, were still in the Early Stone Age. When at last man moved on to the next stage, it was not a general advance; in the first instance it is certain tribes which push out ahead.

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The next stage was initiated by the invention of writing. All the civilizations of what we call the "ancient world" were conditioned by writing. Writing not only extended the possibilities of communication between men separated by space, and so made possible the co-operation of larger numbers, but bound the generations together by the transmission of thought in books. We may say that this stage, co-extensive with the ancient civilizations, and continuing up to the end of the Middle Ages, lasted some 6,500 years—from the first invention of writing in Egypt, somewhere about 5000 B.C., to the Renaissance in Europe which ushered in the modern world—only six millenniums and a half, as against the long series of millenniums during which mankind paused at the first stage..

The modern world—"Western," European, civilization since the Renaissance—would have been impossible without the multiplication of books and papers through printing. But the modern world has not been at all a time of pause. There have been no other three centuries and a half in human history during which we can see so continuous an advance in knowledge and in command over Nature, during which change has been so rapid. Between the invention of printing and the discovery of steam-power and electricity, which have given the whole globe, as it were, a single nervous system, we have the lapse of less than four centuries. One wonders whether any increased acceleration in the rate of progress is possible—or even desirable for the mental stability of mankind.

III

TEN THOUSAND YEARS BEFORE CHRIST

SUPPOSING we could pass in an aeroplane which, like Mr. Wells's Time Machine, had the faculty of travelling backwards in time as well as traversing space, over the earth 10000 B.C., we should, in passing over Europe, look down on nothing but region after region of dark forest and rocky mountain and waste moorland; and there where some day was to be London and Paris and Rome we should see at most, in the way of something human, some skin-clad shaggy creature, crawling, like a cunning animal, through the bush, in quest of game. When, having passed over the Mediterranean Sea, we came to the north-east corner of Africa, we should see the river we call the Nile rolling northwards its volume of waters, and men of a darker species but no higher in the scale than the skin-clad men of Europe, naked in body, crouching among the papyrus jungles on the river-banks, or paddling rude boats here and there over the surface of the water, to catch the river-fowl or fish. And as we passed on eastwards, having crossed a vast empty desert of sand, we should come to another country where two great rivers flowed southwards from the mountain mass of Armenia, and entered side by side, only twenty-five miles apart, a great alluvial plain—a wide flat land, with no bordering hills like the Nile Valley, a land that was here dry

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desert and there rank swamp, and then farther away from the river a country of thin scrub, changing still farther off into the desolation of bare sand. The two rivers rise in flood in the early summer, and change their beds from time to time in the soft yielding mud. Part of their waters runs off and ends in great stagnant lagoons, part ultimately by different channels finds its way into the arm of the ocean which we call the Persian Gulf. Where the moisture from the rivers penetrated, we should see thick forests of date-palms and poplars. It is a land of very fierce heat in the summer, and the lagoons breed infinite swarms of flies. But here, too, as on the Nile, there are human beings living in miserable huts of some sort near the banks of the river, pushing their coracles among the reeds, and gathering the dates from the palms.

IV

THE DAWN IN EGYPT

IF we made the same journey again some five thousand years later—viz., about 5000 B.C.—we should not see much that was different in Europe, nor probably in the Land of the Two Rivers; but in the Nile Valley we should discover that something new was beginning to happen in this breed of human creatures. The men here—perhaps belonging to some race which has found its way into the country from the south since we were last there—

have learnt to build houses of the river-mud, the mud mixed with chopped straw formed into bricks and dried in the sun; they have learnt to sow seed in the damp, rich, alluvial soil, and gather the grain that grows of it to make bread; they have learnt that the copper found in the border hills, especially when mixed with tin, makes better weapons and tools than can be made of stone; and with their new tools they have learnt to shape larger blocks of stone brought down from the hills, so that they can be used for building or for preserving carved signs from generation to generation. These carved signs are the great discovery that, after thousands of years, is going to bring man into the light of history; they are the beginning of writing. The men we see in the Nile Valley are now building their houses of mud brick in compact assemblages at intervals along the river—in towns. Each town has its own territory of fields stretched out on this or that side of the river, to touch the territory of the next town. Each town has its own ruler and its own god or goddess, to whom some animal is sacred, and whose temple is built in its midst or close at hand. Sometimes one town is at war with another. There is no one ruler of the whole long valley. And where the hills cease on either side, and the river spreads out in its delta towards the sea, the country it waters is still largely a vast extent of wild papyrus swamp.

We return two thousand years later, in 3000 B.C., and find that the civilization has made progress. Men arose in one or other of the towns strong

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enough or successful enough to hold, not their own town only, but many of the neighbouring towns under their rule. Under the dominion of kings larger masses of men were drawn together to co-operate, for war or for construction. At last there was one who became king of the whole country, all the way from the Delta, as far as the settlements of this race extended up the River, to the lands inhabited by black men. And now the kings of the Upper and the Lower Country have a command of material and human labour such as no man has had before. They can rear great buildings of stone as their sepulchres and memorials. In a hundred years or so from now King Kufu will build the pyramid which was still at the beginning of our own nineteenth century the highest thing built by man upon the face of the earth. And the writing of which we saw the beginnings in 5000 B.C. has been elaborated. There are now not only inscriptions carved in stone everywhere upon temples or monuments, but the fibre of the papyrus reed is woven into paper, and men paint and write upon it, and make rolls in which the thoughts and the knowledge of one man may be transmitted to other men far separated from him by space or time. The towns still go on having their own rulers, under the paramount lord of the land; they still go on worshipping their own special gods; and perhaps quarrelling with their neighbours whose sacred animal is different from their own (indeed, they will still go on doing so more than four thousand years later, as is told us by the Roman satirist);

yet with the one kingdom there has come to exist a need of fitting the different local religions together into one system of thought, and a common Egyptian religion is in the making. If the civilization of the Nile Valley in 3000 B.C. has still many primitive features as compared with our own, yet we are amongst men who can be called civilized, when we descend there, and the level might at any rate be held equal to that of a great part of Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire.

V

THE DAWN IN SHINAR

WHEN we cross the great desert on the east, and come to the Land of the Two Rivers, we find that here, too, man is now making a new start forward. In many ways this country is like the Nile country: here, too, is a rich alluvial soil which gives a large return to simple agricultural processes, and furnishes material for bricks; here, too (though at an earlier season of the year), the rivers, swollen by the melting of the snow in Armenia, rise above their banks and flood the flat land. But the conditions are not quite so easy as in Egypt. For one thing, the two rivers are less regular in their ways than the Nile, and are liable to sudden floods which may play havoc with the works of man. More human effort in the way of draining and irrigation is needed in order to turn the richness of

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the soil to full account.' And, again, the Land of the Two Rivers is much less shut off from the surrounding world than the Nile Valley is, between its long ranges of desert hills. It is always open to invasion from the nomads of the steppe on the west or the highland peoples to the north and east. For civilization to grow a long period was needed, in which it could be shielded from disturbance from outside. Perhaps it was because in both these ways the Land of the Two Rivers was less favourably situated than the Land of the One River, that the men on the Nile started before the men on the Euphrates and Tigris.

Yet in 3000 B.C. we find that they, also, have made a start. They have dug canals and built cities of brick. And here, too, each city has its own ruler and its own god, though there is generally one ruler stronger than the rest who claims a kind of authority over the whole land. The principal cities are in the country between the lower reaches of the two rivers: Nippur (whose god, Ellil, is venerated by the people of all the cities), Kish, Lagash, Uruk, Ur, Eridu, Larsa; higher up the Tigris on the confines of the alluvial country is Upi (Opis). In the Nile Valley all the people were of one nation and speech; here in the alluvial Land of the Two Rivers, which our Old Testament calls the land of Shinar (it ought probably to be read Shanaar) we find the country divided between two races, speaking wholly different languages. The northern part of the country, called Akkad, is inhabited by a people of the Semitic group, distant

cousins of the Arabs, the Hebrews, the Phœnicians and Syrians, men with long black crinkled beards, whose ancestors no doubt had migrated at some time into this country from Arabia. The southern part, towards the mouth of the rivers, called Sumer, is inhabited by a race which has no affinity with any other race we know on earth, men with clean-shaven faces and bald shorn heads, with rather pointed prominent noses and thin fine lips. Which race had come first into the country we do not know. But although the two peoples are distinct, they have learnt from each other; both pay homage and send offerings to the great gods of the land, such as Ellil of Nippur. The Sumerians depict their gods as in appearance Akkadian, and the Akkadians have learnt from the Sumerians the invention which this people made in the Land of the Two Rivers (like that which the men in the Nile Valley had made some two thousand years earlier), writing—a script less picturesque than the Egyptian hieroglyphics with their little figures of men and beasts and vultures, a script which consists of groups of short wedge-shaped lines, and which we therefore know to-day as “cuneiform.”

Like the men in the Nile Valley, the men on the Two Rivers cut words on slabs of stone, though stone is much more precious here than in Egypt, since the hills whence it has to be brought are much farther away. But whereas for commoner use the Egyptians have their paper of papyrus fibre, the men of the Two Rivers have a far more lasting material—little bricks and cylinders and tablets of

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clay. Thousands of these documents in clay have been got out of the ground in the country of the Two Rivers in our own day, with the writing as clear as when the clay was first baked; thousands more are still there in the ground waiting for future excavators. By means of what was written on stone or clay, we can trace in a fragmentary way the shifting of power from the ruling house of one city to the ruling house of another city, from Sumerian to Semite, and from Semite to Sumerian, over the centuries from about 2800 B.C. onwards. But this is not the place to give lists of the kings who reigned in the land of Shinar thousands of years ago—names many of which look strange enough in our modern script: Lugalshagengur, Enshagkushanna, Lugalkigubnidudu. One can only try to bring home to the imagination how far in those days Shinar, like Egypt, had advanced beyond the life of primitive man. There were now two regions in the earth, among the vast barbarian darkness, where men were living that life of greater knowledge, of greater command over Nature, of greater complexity, which we term civilized.

Here are cities which would not compare unfavourably with modern cities of the East—men living together in great masses, in labyrinths of streets among houses of sun-dried brick. Their transactions are ordered by written deeds—contracts, sales, loans. The stamp of the seal upon the moist clay—the seal which a man wore upon his person, and which it was hard to imitate without detection—takes the place which a man's autograph

has with us. There is a fixed system of law—how far written down before Hammurabi, how far preserved in oral tradition only, we cannot say—administered to the people by judges. There are also those artificial social distinctions which civilization has always implied—the privileged position of the “Son of a man,” in the phrase of the Babylonian law code, as against the “poor.” There are also slaves in the cities beside free men.

Outside the city gates the soft dusty roads go at a dead level between the fields or the groves fed by irrigation from the two rivers. The country is already covered by a network of canals, the work of many generations, by which much that had been swamp and waste has been changed into cornland or luxuriant garden. To repair canals or to dig new ones was the work upon which every ruler in Shinar prided himself beyond everything else. And wherever the water was brought in due measure, the fertility of the land was such that it seemed to strangers almost miraculous.

“It is so bountiful in its yield of those fruits which men call cereal,” wrote someone who saw the land in the fifth century B.C., “that it returns for the most part two-hundred-fold, and, at the best, even three-hundred-fold. The breadth of the blades of wheat and barley there easily reaches four fingers. And of millet and of sesame what the size is—as it were that of a tree—though I know well, I will not mention, being sure that, for those who have never visited Babylonia, even so much as I have said already as to its fruits will have gone

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far beyond the measure of belief" (Herodotus, I. 193).

It has, of course, to be remembered that, rich as the soil of Babylonia is, the amount of its surface which can be irrigated is limited. The volume of water brought down by the two rivers is limited. It has been calculated that the maximum area which was cultivated in antiquity was between 20,000 and 30,000 square kilometres; the remaining 70,000 square kilometres of the alluvial country must have always remained in its primitive desolation.*

Wherever the man of Shinar passed beyond the area of cultivation, wherever he got a view, unobstructed by palm-groves or poplars or willows, he saw the plain stretching flat as far as his eye could reach. The mountains far away to the east which buttress the tableland of Persia were beyond the horizon, and the plain stretched everywhere to the horizon, level like the sea. He had to travel far to see anything like a hill. Perhaps it was for this reason that the people of Shinar were so fond of erecting great structures of brick, platform above platform, till from the chamber at the top you could look down upon city and fields and groves spread out below like a map. Their temples

* According to Willcocks, the water of the two rivers would not suffice for irrigating more than 30,000 square kilometres. This, however, is allowing for enough water to remain in the Tigris to make steamer navigation possible. If the whole volume of water were used for irrigation, a larger area could be cultivated. This would imply that communication by steamer was replaced by railway and road communication.

regularly took this form. And from the top in the warm cloudless nights your eye could take in the whole moving dome of stars. The men of Shinar observed the stars more methodically than men had ever done before, and, because their observations could be written down, the traditional body of astronomical knowledge could grow from generation to generation. It was indeed a small body of knowledge compared even with that which the Greeks possessed later on in this field, and the bulk of the astrology which was passed off under the Roman Empire, and in later ages, as ancient doctrine of the Babylonian sages was, as a matter of fact, elaborated by the Greeks. But it is true that the men of Shinar gazed at the expanse of the night skies in the belief that the fortunes of men somehow depended upon signs in the heavens, and conferred upon certain of the constellations, which they came to distinguish as stable groups among the bewildering multitude of stars, those imaginary figures which have been traditional in astronomy ever since--the Scorpion, the Archer, half man half beast, the He-goat with a fish's tail. There was especial significance for the Sumerians in the planet we still call Venus, and which they associated with the great goddess of love and procreation, Nanai, whose worship was centred in the city of Uruk.

VI

EARLY KINGS OF SUMER AND AKKAD

WHEN the whole land of Shinar—both the land of Sumer and the land of Akkad—was held together as a unity under the hand of a single king, it constituted an agglomeration of power which might assert itself over the neighbouring less civilized lands. Such an agglomeration of power; such a concentration of the efforts of a great number of men, seemed possible in those days only under a monarch. There was more individual freedom, we must think, in the primitive tribes than in the cities of Shinar or Egypt; man in order to advance in co-ordinated power had had to sacrifice something of his original rude liberty. But a King of Sumer and Akkad was in a position to entertain imperialistic ambitions. About 2500 B.C., it is calculated, King Sargon of Akkad carried his arms beyond the limits of Shinar east and west and north and south. On the east he subjugated the people of Elam in the upland country now called Khuzistan (the part of the present kingdom of Persia which falls on the south-west to the lower end of the alluvial plain where the two rivers now meet), inhabited in those days by a race speaking a tongue of their own, akin neither to the Semitic languages nor to Sumerian, with Susa (the modern Shuster) for their chief city—a race sometimes subject to Sumerian or Akkadian

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kings, sometimes raiding and conquering the cities of Shinar, with a form of civilization, in any case, borrowed in its external expressions from that of Shinar. To the south, the ships of Sargon traversed the waters of the Persian Gulf, to link the Bahrein Islands to his empire, the islands now linked to another Empire by its ships. On the north his armies pushed far up the Tigris, conquering the Semitic tribes of that region, as far at least as the present Armenian town of Diârbekr, where a basalt tablet of Sargon's son and successor has been found. The old Semitic city of Charrân (in the Old Testament, Haran; in Latin, Carrhæ), in the rolling grassland of Mesopotamia, perhaps already at this time had accepted more or less of the culture of Shinar. It was in later centuries the seat of a special cult of the Moon-god of Shinar, Sin. On the west of the Euphrates, Sargon subdued the country of another Semitic people, the Amorites, who occupied Northern Syria between the Euphrates and the sea. He reached the great "Sea of the Sunset," and his ships went across to establish his authority in Cyprus—an island now linked, like the Bahrein Islands, to the British Empire by its ships. He had conquered almost the whole world known to the men of Shinar; beyond there was only barbarian darkness—except, of course, in the Nile Valley, whose kings, about the same time as the conquests of Sargon, were annexing Palestine and Phœnicia, and must have had diplomatic relations with the King of Akkad. Sargon was now "lord of the four quarters of the earth," for the men of

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Shinar did not think of the barbarian darkness beyond the range of their knowledge as worth reckoning. This world that Sargon conquered in the middle of the third millennium before Christ is to-day a field for the operations of armies come in part from an island far away beyond the sunset, and in part from the land of India, far beyond the hills of Elam on the east.

The Akkadian empire of Sargon did not last. About two centuries later the chief power has again passed to the Sumerians. It is the turn of the city of Ur ("Ur of the Chaldees") to furnish the paramount dynasty. And the provinces which Sargon had conquered outside Shinar fell away. The last King of Ur was carried away captive by Elamite invaders. It would seem that after this Shinar fell again for a time into separate kingdoms. When we look over what we can trace of the history of Shinar as a whole, one thing that strikes us is the inability of its inhabitants to found one single strong and durable State. It is only for a time that now and again a dynasty arises in one or other of the Sumerian or Akkadian cities strong enough to concentrate the forces of the country. The broken history of Shinar contrasts in this way with the history of Egypt, which remained, with relatively brief intervals, a single independent kingdom for some four thousand years. This may be due in part to the fact that two distinct races with two distinct languages occupy the plain of the Two Rivers, whereas in the Valley of the Nile there is one homogeneous people, speaking the same lan-

guage, in part to the fact that, while the Nile Valley is fenced off from the outside world by the bordering hills and deserts, Shinar is open to invasion from all sides.

The political history of Shinar is broken, but through all changes of dynasty and shiftings of the political centre the culture of the country remained the same. The fields were irrigated and tilled, men bought and sold and registered their transactions on tablets of clay, and worshipped the gods in the old way. People of steppe and mountain coming into the land of Shinar, amongst its groves and gardens, still marvelled at an earthly paradise, such as they saw no parallel to elsewhere. They saw high walls of brick and towers built. it seemed, to reach unto heaven. They saw the images of men and animals and fantastic monsters, delineated by an old traditional art which had its home in this land, carved in stone or composed in bright-coloured enamels under the dazzling sunlight. They saw markets and bazaars, where crowds of men trafficked, in long robes, whose feet, bare or sandalled, made no sound in the soft thick dust of the streets. They saw wares displayed, rich embroidered stuffs such as none save the people of Shinar knew how to make, or goods brought in from neighbouring countries on the backs of swaying camels or of asses. But they saw no horses in the days of King Sargon of Akkad, because the tribes wandering somewhere far away to the north, who had made the horse their servant and companion, had not yet found their way as far south as the Land of the Two Rivers.

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Neither had the Pharaoh of Egypt any horses yet to draw his chariot, nor the nomad Arabs any horses to ride.

VII

INFLUENCE ON OTHER LANDS

It could not but be that, from realms such as that of Shinar and that of Egypt, an influence and light should go forth all over the surrounding countries. The life of ruder peoples was raised in the scale by two main ways of contact. Partly the mere sight of the life lived along the Nile and in the Land of the Two Rivers, the report of it carried home to other lands by those who had seen, the products of its art, carved work or weapon or goodly garment, suggested ideas of dignity and splendour to peoples who were susceptible of suggestion. The King of Akkad or of Ur set a standard, which kinglets far away were stirred to imitate according to their power, just as the Roman Empire long after imposed upon the imagination of Northern chieftains. And peoples with original artistic faculty would be stirred by the movement propagated from land to land or overseas to elaborate their life along their own lines. Even before the days of King Sargon a certain type of civilization distinct in character had come to exist in the coasts and islands of the Eastern Mediterranean, whose products dug out of the ground in Crete are termed by Sir Arthur Evans "Early Minoan." In a place like Cyprus, influences

from Shinar crossed with influences from Egypt. In these countries, too, the old implements of stone had been superseded by bronze.

• VIII

THE RISE OF BABYLON

THERE was also another way in which Shinar was a school for the neighbouring peoples—by being conquered. When from time to time some warlike tribe from hill or steppe broke into the land and set up a kingdom there, they took on the forms of the higher civilization. They paid homage to the great gods of the cities of Shinar in the traditional way; they adopted the languages of Sumer and Akkad and the style of native kings. An instance of this are the Amorites, who infiltrated or swept into the country at the end of the third millennium before Christ, about five centuries after King Sargon. Towards 2000 B.C. an Amorite chieftain, Sumuabu, carved out a kingdom for himself in the land of Shinar with a new centre. This was a town on the Euphrates, not hitherto important among the cities of the land, Bab-ilu, "Gate of the Gods," which the Hebrews knew afterwards as Babel, and the Greeks as Babylon. A king of this dynasty a hundred years later, Hammurabi, was one of the great rulers in the history of Shinar. Once more the country was united under a single monarch. The graven chronicle of Hammurabi still

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tells us how "he gathered his host and went against the King of Ur, and conquered the city of Ur and the city of Larsa, and brought the spoil of them to Babylon." He waged war with the Elamites, and occupied the frontier districts which barred their incursions. He extended his rule outside Shinar, up the Tigris, and incorporated the Assyrian country. The Assyrian country was higher up the Tigris, within sight of the mountain ramparts of Irân. It was the continuation eastwards of the grassy steppe lands of Mesopotamia, less enervating in climate than the hot lands of Shinar. Its inhabitants were Semites, like the Akkadians and Amorites, and their language was closely akin to Akkadian. Their chief city had first been Asshur on the Tigris, from which the name of Asshur was extended to the country and the people and the god of the people; but before the time of Hammurabi the Assyrians had built another city farther up the river, destined to eclipse Asshur, the city of Nineveh. The Assyrians had the same civilization, and worshipped the same gods and used the same writing, as the people of Shinar; but their temper seems to have been more warlike: whereas the great goddess, the Ishtar (Astarte) of the people of Shinar, was a goddess of voluptuousness, the Ishtar of the men of Asshur was a goddess of war. Under Hammurabi of Babylon, Assyria came to be regarded as an integral part of the kingdom of Sumer and Akkad.

But Hammurabi was not only a conquerer. The letters he wrote to the royal officials in the southern

cities of the kingdom have been discovered, and show him as a careful supervisor of the administration. He seems to have directed especial attention to the irrigation upon which the life of the country depended, repairing or maintaining the old canals, digging new ones.

His code of laws, rediscovered some years ago, is a document of peculiar interest. The comparison with the law of Moses was one which immediately suggested itself, and has been a topic for scholars. It shows a punitive system adapted to class distinctions within society. "If a man has caused the loss of a gentleman's eye, his eye also shall be put out. If he has shattered a gentleman's limb, his own limb shall be shattered." On the other hand, "if he has caused a poor man to lose his eye or shattered a poor man's limb, he shall pay one mina of silver." Justice is still rough and ready. "If the doctor has treated a gentleman for a severe wound with a lancet of bronze, and has caused that gentleman to die, or has opened an abscess on the eye for a gentleman with a bronze lancet, and has caused the loss of the gentleman's eye, that doctor's hands shall be cut off." "If a builder has built a house for a man, and has not made strong his work, and the house he built has fallen, and he has caused the death of the owner of the house, that builder shall be put to death."

The code of Hammurabi, no doubt, represents not so much the ideas of a single man as the ethical and legal conceptions prevalent in Shinar in the twentieth century B.C. It must always henceforth

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be a standard document for those who study the development of the ideas of good and evil among men.

After the time of this Babylonian dynasty the Semite element in Shinar finally absorbed the Sumerian. The old Sumerian language became a dead language which was still preserved alongside of Akkadian, for religious purposes, as Latin was in the Middle Ages, but the living speech of Shinar was henceforth Semitic.

The Amorite dynasty of Babylon, like others in Shinar, had its day and perished. The last successor of Hammurabi known from the monuments seems to belong to the earlier half of the eighteenth century. Then once more foreign peoples swept over the land. The Hittites, of Asia Minor, of whom we now first hear, raided Babylon, and carried away the image of the special god of Babylon, Marduk (called by the generic title Bel = Baal, "Lord"). A people from the mountains between Babylonia and Persia, the Kasshu (Cossæans), broke in from the east, and set a king of their own upon the throne of Babylon. We can trace their dynasty for a century, and then a darkness of about two centuries comes down upon the history of Shinar.

. IX

THE ORIGINAL INDO-EUROPEANS

GREAT movements and shiftings of peoples, such as we can see later on in Greek and Roman times, when the frontiers of Mediterranean civilization were breached more and more, as centuries went on, by primitive races—Gauls, Cimbrians, Teutones, Goths, Vandals, Franks, Huns—such movements had been going on all through the unrecorded past of mankind. It is no doubt partly to such movements that the gap in the history of Shinar after the middle of the seventeenth century is due. But it is time for us now to take note, among these wandering peoples, of one stock that has especial interest for us. Centuries before, perhaps in the earlier part of the third millennium B.C., in some part of the earth between the Central Asian tableland and the Atlantic—though where, in all this region, it is impossible to say—a people, or a family of tribes, was living together, in whom we, the present peoples of Europe, can see our remote ancestors. And not only we Europeans, but the Persians and Aryan Indians as well. All the languages we speak are derived from the speech of that people: when the Indian Nationalist to-day sings his song “Bande mataram” (I salute the Mother), he is at the same time proclaiming unconsciously his brotherhood with the alien rulers who also call their mothers “mother.” It is only

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because our common ancestors in their old forgotten home called their mothers "matar," or something like it, that the Englishman says "mother," and the Indian, "matara," to-day. We do not know what name that people gave themselves when they were all living together as one: Learned men now commonly refer to them as Indo-Europeans, Germans naturally like to call them "Indogermanen." Later on, when one branch of them split away and took possession of Persia and Northern India, the people of that branch called themselves "Arya" (the Noble); and it was the fashion a little while ago, and is still common in popular writings, to call the whole family of Indo-European peoples and languages "Aryan." This is a much more convenient and pleasant-sounding name than the cumbersome "Indo-European"; but, unfortunately, it is wanted as the special name of the Persian-Indian branch, and it tends to confusion if we apply it to the whole family. So, although it seems an outrage to apply to a primitive pastoral people a name which so suggests dry scholastic classification as "Indo-European," there is no better name which offers.

We do not know what this people called itself in its old home, but we know something about its manner of life from the words which have come down from the original common stock. We know it was a pastoral people with flocks and herds, and we know that it had among its domestic animals one unknown to Egypt and the land of Shinar till the second millennium B.C.—the *horse*, for which it had

a name that sounded like "ekvo" or "ekwo." It used implements of bronze, which metal it called "ayas" (the Latin "æs"). It knew how to plough the ground and sow seed and grind corn. It worshipped the great Sky-god, Dyaus, whom the Greeks later on called "Father Zeus," and the Romans "Father Jove." From its old home offshoots of this people pushed out gradually over the whole of Europe, and across Persia into India. The area covered by these Indo-European peoples was thus much more extensive than the area covered by the Semites—Shinar and Syria and Arabia. Of course, when the Indo-Europeans came into new lands they did not exterminate the earlier inhabitants: they intermingled with them and absorbed them in various degrees; so that, although all the peoples of Europe to-day (except the Basques, the Finns, and the Magyars) speak Indo-European languages, we are far from being of pure Indo-European blood. Often, it may be, the Indo-European conquerers were a minority who imposed their languages and their ideas upon a subject population—in Europe as in India. The Basques in the Pyrenees are the last relic of the earlier inhabitants of Europe who still keep their old language.

It was in the second millennium B.C. that Indo-European peoples began to come within the purview of the old civilization in the Land of the Two Rivers. Probably it was during the centuries between Sargon of Akkad and Hammurabi of Babylon (between 2500 and 1900 B.C.) that the

Aryan branch of the Indo-Europeans were establishing themselves on the Iranian tableland (the present Persia), and conquering the dark-skinned aborigines of the Panjab. The oldest monument of Indo-European literature, the hymns of the Indian "Rigveda," is assigned conjecturally to somewhere about 2000 B.C. The Cossæans who invaded Shinar in the eighteenth century, although not themselves Aryans, must have been in contact with the Aryans, since they knew the name of Shuriash for the Sun-god, which is plainly the Aryan "sûrya." Soon after 1900 B.C. we find a horse mentioned for the first time in a legal cuneiform document, delightfully described as an "ass of the hill country." Two centuries later we find a people akin to the Hittites (*i.e.*, not themselves Indo-European) powerful on the Upper Euphrates, the Mitani, whose reigning dynasty seems by its names to have been Aryan.

X

THE FIRST ASSYRIAN EMPIRE

DURING the thousand years which go roughly from 1600 to 600 B.C. the centre of power is no longer in Shinar (Babylonia), but with the kindred Semitic people farther up the Tigris—the Assyrians. Babylon sees itself outshone by its rivals Asshur or Nineveh. The Assyrian kingdom presents the aspect of a strongly organized monarchy with a restless appetite for conquest. Its culture, its

writing, its art, its religion, are still those of Shinar, but it is animated by a new aggressive spirit. And yet for Assyria to maintain its position required a continued effort, and it could not but be that its periods of supremacy should alternate with periods when its arm failed against the pressure from outside. For on its eastern and northern frontiers Assyria adjoined a mountain country whose races were not easily held under, and were always ready to attack the conqueror; and if it strove to extend its power across Mesopotamia to the west, it again came into contact with the peoples of Northern Syria and of the mountains which separate Northern Syria from Asia Minor. The first empire constituted by Assyria broke up; after an interval of weakness it put forth a new effort, succeeded in creating an empire more extensive than any yet united under one man, and then, within a generation from the height of its power, Assyria had perished, as a kingdom, for ever.

It was part of the ambition of the kings of Assyria to dominate the land of Shinar. The old cities and temples of that land, the cradle of their culture, had for their imagination a prestige to which, with all their military predominance, they must bow. And, besides, the riches of the alluvial country continued to make it in one way the centre of the world. In Shinar, since the days of Ham-murabi, the city of Babylon held its place as the capital city, and the cities lower down, which had been great before Babylon was heard of, decayed or fell to a subordinate grade. And the kings of

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Babylon did not readily submit to the supremacy of the king of Assyria. The history of these thousand years are, therefore, full of wars between the Assyrians and their Babylonian cousins. Sometimes the king of Assyria succeeded in combining with his title of "King of Assyria" the title of "King of Sumer and Akkad"; sometimes the kings of Babylon were able to drive back the Assyrian armies and assert their independence.

The imperialism of the Assyrian kings had a strong religious complexion. Their Assyrian god, who personified his people, and whose name was the same as that of the country, Asshur, was the Lord in whose service and at whose behest they went forth to trample down the earth. Their conquests were marked by a ruthlessness and ferocity which shows well how they conceived the character of their god:

"Asshur my Lord commanded me to go forth. . . . I covered the regions of Saraush and of Ammaush with ruins. . . . I proved myself against their armies at the mountain of Aruma, I chastised them, I strawed the earth with their bodies, as they had been beasts of the field; I took their cities in possession, I carried away their gods, I led them away captive, them and their goods and their treasures; I burned the cities with fire, I destroyed them, I made them even with the ground, I made of them heaps and a desolation; I laid upon them the grievous yoke of my dominion, and in their presence I gave thanks unto Asshur my Lord."

"I slew two hundred and sixty fighting men;

I cut off their heads and made pyramids thereof."

"I slew one of every two. I built a wall before the great gates of the city; I flayed the chief men of the rebels, and I covered the wall with their skins. Some of them were enclosed alive in the bricks of the wall, some of them were crucified on stakes along the wall; I caused a great multitude of them to be flayed in my presence, and I covered the wall with their skins. I gathered together the heads in the form of crowns, and their pierced bodies in the form of garlands."

"The inhabitants forsook their strongholds and their castles; they fled for safety towards Matui, a strong country; I rushed after them in pursuit; I strawed a thousand bodies of the warriors upon the mountain; I covered the mountain with their dead bodies; I filled the valleys therewith. As for two hundred that I had taken alive, I pierced their wrists."

"My face rejoiceth over ruins; in the satisfying of my wrath I have my pleasure."

The Assyrian war-bulletins, it is to be noticed, never show anything but victories.

The first expansion of the Assyrian power took place in the twelfth century. King Tiglath-pileser (Tugultipalesharra) I. conquered on the west the Moschians and the Commagenians in the hill-country of the Upper Euphrates between Mesopotamia and Asia Minor, marched victoriously eastwards into the mountains of Kurdistan, penetrated into what is now Armenia to the north, subjugated

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the petty kingdoms of Northern Syria, crossed over Lebanon to the Phœnician coast, and looked upon the Mediterranean Sea. The king of Egypt, alarmed at his approach, sent him presents, amongst them crocodiles and hippopotami for the royal menagerie on the Tigris. Tiglath-pileser on another campaign marched down the Tigris and subjugated the land of Shinar, but here the king of Babylon succeeded in inflicting bloody reverses upon the Assyrian armies and driving them back to their own land. The son of Tiglath-pileser took revenge and we hear of Baghdad (not yet of great importance among the towns of Shinar) being captured by the Assyrians. But within a few reigns the empire of Tiglath-pileser had broken up, and the peoples of Syria and Palestine did not know again the Assyrian terror for many generations to come.

XI

ISRAEL

THE Palestine which had trembled at Tiglath-pileser I. was not the Holy Land which we think of in connection with the name. It was the land of the Amorites, Canaanites, Hivites, Perizzites, and Jebusites, which had not yet seen Joshua and his bands. It was during the temporary occultation of the Assyrian power that all that earlier Israelite history which we know from our Bible—the conquest of the land, the time of the Judges, Saul and

David and Solomon, and the earlier kings of Israel and Judah—was unrolled in the country between the Jordan Valley and the sea. To any outside observer who might have travelled through the Land of the Two Rivers, Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt, in the tenth or ninth centuries B.C., the little Israelite kingdoms could not have seemed of any great importance among the kingdoms of men. In other kingdoms, too, men were writing their thoughts or their histories upon stone or clay or papyrus or parchment; but whereas all that was written elsewhere in those days between the western hills of Persia and the Mediterranean was forgotten in a few generations, some of the things written then in the land of Israel have never passed from living memory, and are at this day being read daily over the whole surface of the globe.

What there was in the ideas of this small people to give them so strange a pre-eminence cannot be stated except as part of a whole philosophy which tries to answer the question: What is the meaning of man's passage over this stage of time? That does not come within our business here. But so much is clear: Just because the records of this little people are the things most familiar to us in that old world, it is almost inevitable that we look back at the happenings of those centuries from the standpoint of Israel. We see from these records how the Assyrian power appeared, not to the monarch who inscribes his conquests on stone, but to one of the peoples on whom the shadow of Assyrian dominion fell.

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All through the earliest history of Israel in Canaan, we hear nothing about Asshur. The enemies of Israel are the neighbouring petty kingdoms—the Philistines, the Moabites, the Syrians of Hamath or Damascus. The great kingdom near them was Egypt, and their imaginations were possessed by the splendour and power of Pharaoh. Once we hear of an Egyptian army raiding the land and spoiling Jerusalem. Then in the middle of the eighth century we witness dramatically the reappearance of the great Power on the Tigris above the Jerusalem horizon. In the days of Abaz, king of Judah, Jerusalem is threatened by a coalition of Northern Israel with the Syrians. That is the immediate danger. And suddenly a greater Power looms up behind the enemies of the north. Assyria has grown strong again, is again reaching westwards, and in that black shadow soon all other enmities and terrors are lost.

Those were the days in which one individual figure stands out, still living and real for us—the prophet and statesman of Jerusalem, Isaiah, the son of Amoz. The first policy of king Ahaz was to get the support of the more distant Assyrian Power against the nearer enemies, Northern Israel and Damascus. At that moment Isaiah foresaw the Assyrian sweeping over the whole land like a devastating deluge, over Northern Israel and Damascus—yes, and over his own Judah, over Immanuel's land, as well.

The Northern Israelites had already, before Isaiah's time, had some dealing with the Assyrians,

By 860 B.C. Assyrian armies had again crossed the Lebanon and compelled the homage of the Phœnician seaboard. In 854 soldiers of Ahab, king of Israel, had fought side by side with the Syrians against the forces of Shalmaneser II. of Assyria. In 842, after Hazael, king of Syria, had been bloodily defeated by an Assyrian army, Jehu, king of Israel, had thought it prudent to send presents to the king of Assyria. But for the hundred years which had followed this battle the Assyrian menace had again receded from the land of Israel. The Assyrian royal house had been weakened by dissensions, and the Assyrians had had their hands too full with wars in other directions to push forward in Palestine. Now, however, in the days of Ahaz, king of Judah, a strong man was once more on the throne of Nineveh; Tiglath-pileser III. (745-727 B.C.). What Isaiah had foreseen happened. Assyrian armies overran Northern Israel and carried off its people into regions far away. They swept away the Syrian kingdom, and in 732 the king of Assyria held a durbar in conquered Damascus. When Tiglath-pileser III. died, Hoshea, the man who still kept up the style of Israelite king in Samaria, with diminished territory and population, was a vassal to Assyria. Then Hoshea tried to shake off the yoke by intrigues with Egypt, but Tiglath-pileser's son, Shalmaneser IV., put him to death and laid siege to Samaria. Shalmaneser did not live to see its capture. Samaria fell in 722, after the Assyrian throne had passed to Sargon, one of Shalmaneser's great generals. The kingdom

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of Northern Israel was finally extinguished. Judah remained alone to represent the chosen people of the Lord.

XII

THE SECOND ASSYRIAN EMPIRE

ALL this time, as we have said, the Assyrians were waging wars elsewhere. They were, as it were, permanently fighting on many fronts at once; and operations had continually to be suspended in one direction, because rumours of trouble came from the opposite extremity of the empire. On the west the ambition of the Assyrians was to cross the Taurus and establish themselves in Asia Minor. The highland peoples who inhabited the country round about the modern Marash and Zeitun were attacked and slaughtered, and the way opened for the officers of the king of Assyria to the centre of the Asia Minor tableland. Sometimes the Cilician plain with the town of Tarsus was subject to Assyria.

On the north they had a formidable enemy in the kingdom which consolidated itself in the country now known as Armenia, the region of Lake Van and Lake Urumiyah, but was then called Ararat.* The Armenians, who are an Indo-European people, had not yet come into this country, and the ethnological affinities of this ancient people of Ararat seem to

* Ararat, in the Old Testament, is the name of a *country*, not of a mountain. The ark rests "on the mountains of Ararat,"

have been with the Georgians of to-day. It took its culture, its writing and style of art, in any case, from the south, and inscriptions in cuneiform, similar in appearance to the monuments of Shinar, are still found in these regions of Armenia.

On the east, the Assyrian armies climbed through the mountains on to the borders of the tableland of Irân. Irân is the Persian name for the country covered by the present kingdom of Persia. We saw how before 2000 B.C. the Aryans were taking this country in possession. Irân, in fact, means etymologically the Aryan country. At the time we have now come to, the Aryans of Irân were still living for the most part a primitive pastoral existence round the strongholds of different independent chiefs. But already one powerful kingdom had been formed amongst the Iranians, there where Irân was in the closest connection, by the mountain tracks, with the Babylonian-Assyrian country—the kingdom of the Medes, with its centre at Ecbatana (modern Hamadan). Perhaps already the Median kings had left the old simple native tradition, and taken to rich trailing robes, and fashioned their court in emulation of the Semitic despots who reigned on the Euphrates and Tigris.

On the south, of course, the constant endeavour of the Assyrian kings was to maintain their supremacy over the land of Shinar. Again and again Babylon rose in rebellion under its own kings and beat back the Assyrians, and again and again the Assyrians came back and entered Babylon

as conquerors. They put the king of Babylon, if they caught him, to an atrocious death, but they paid ostentatious homage to the Babylonian gods. It can hardly have been but that in those troubled days the old prosperity of Shinar went down, that the canals fell into disrepair, and the wilderness gained upon cultivation. Aramæans—that is, Syrians—from the west seem to have drifted in large numbers into the country, and at this time probably Aramaic was already beginning to supersede the other Semitic languages all across the country between Persia and the Mediterranean. A few centuries later it was the *lingua franca* of all this part of the world.

XIII

ASSYRIA AND EGYPT

UNDER Sargon, who bore the name of the old Akkadian conqueror two thousand years before, the Assyrian Power made new progress. The power of the kingdom of Ararat, to the north, was broken, and the country, if not made tributary, was at any rate made too weak to be dangerous. Assyrian garrisons were established in Media. In Asia Minor the authority of the king of Assyria reached to the Halys (modern Kizil Irmak). Merodach-Baladan, the king of Babylon, was hunted out, and Sargon was installed in Babylon

as "King of Sumer and Akkad." The alternation of rebellion and conquest goes on under Sargon's son Sennacherib (705 to 681 B.C.). His name is familiar to us because the Assyrian Power was now advancing step by step along the bridge constituted by Palestine between sea and desert towards the other great kingdom of the world in the Valley of the Nile. Egypt had been newly consolidated afresh. High up the Nile, in the region of what is now Khartum, a region then called Kush, or by the Greeks Æthiopia, a dynasty of Egyptian origin and culture reigned over an independent kingdom. Presently the king of Ethiopia had come down the Nile as conqueror into the land of his ancestors, and knit Ethiopia and Egypt together as a single realm. It might seem that the great shock of the two civilizations—that which had grown up on the Nile and that which had grown up on the Euphrates and Tigris—was imminent. Already, under Sargon, the Philistine cities had been forced to accept the overlordship of Assyria. In 701 B.C. Sennacherib came down the coast at the head of an army, his face towards Egypt. The first encounter of Assyrian and Egyptian forces took place in the Philistine plain. The Egyptians were badly defeated, and it seemed that the moment was come when the Assyrians could penetrate into the Valley of the Nile. But that hope was not yet destined to be realized.

The petty king of Judah, because Jerusalem was situated on the hills close by the main road of armies along the coast of Palestine, was involved

in these movements. That is why they are to-day more vivid to us than any other part of Assyrian history.

Sennacherib after his victory in the Philistine plain laid siege to the Jewish town of Lachish (a contemporary bas-relief depicting the siege is in the British Museum), and sent two officers of high rank to intimidate Jerusalem by great words. "Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hcnah, and Ivah? Have its gods at all delivered Samaria out of my hand? Which be they, amongst all the gods of these countries, that have delivered their country out of my hand, that Yahweh should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?" Sennacherib could not spare the time at present to attack Jerusalem. According to the reports received, the king of Ethiopia and Egypt was already stirring again. Sennacherib must hasten to Egypt. He sent another message to the king of Judah warning him not to mistake the temporary respite for final safety. And then on the borders of the desert between Palestine and Egypt the Assyrian army was mowed down by a sudden pestilence. The remnant had to take the homeward road as best it could. Long after, in Egypt, Herodotus was told the story how Sennacherib had come against Egypt, and how Pharaoh prayed to the god Ptah, and a horde of rats had attacked the Assyrian army and gnawed through their straps and bow-strings so that they had to flee home. He was shown a statue of the Ethiopian Pharaoh holding a rat in his hand.

The sculptor may have intended it as a symbol of plague.*

Israel also brought the wonderful deliverance into connection with the Divine Power ruling behind events, with the Divine Power as Israel had come especially to apprehend its character. A "messenger of Yahweh," says the Judæan chronicler, went forth and destroyed the army of the Assyrians. For years Isaiah had been declaring to the people of Jerusalem that, if they would only remain still in quietness and confidence, and not increase their armaments by procuring war-horses from Egypt, Yahweh would take care of His city. And now, at the moment when things seemed desperate, a hand not of man had dissipated the peril.

Judah saw no more of the Assyrians in the days of king Hezekiah. Merodach-Baladan, king of Babylon, in one of his moments of successful rebellion, sent a diplomatic mission to the king of Judah, no doubt to concert an understanding against the common enemy. But in 689 B.C., after Merodach-Baladan was dead and another occasion came when the Assyrians had Babylon at their mercy, Sennacherib determined to wipe out the old city of Hammurabi for good. "As for the town and the temples I razed them even to the foundations, I undermined them, I burnt them with fire;

* Apollo Smintheus, the sender of plague, is represented with his foot upon a rat (Pausanias, X. 12). When the Philistine cities are visited by the bubonic plague, they pacify Yahweh by offering golden rats and golden bubos (1 Sam. vi.).

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the wall, the rampart, the sanctuaries of the gods, the pyramids in brick and in earth, I razed them to the ground, I choked the great canal with their rubbish." For ten years the site of Babylon lay a field of ruins. At the end of that time a new king was on the throne of Assyria, Sennacherib's son Ezarhaddon (681-667 B.C.), under whom the Assyrian Empire pushed still farther in conquest. Ezarhaddon set about the rebuilding of Babylon (his mother was a Babylonian), making bricks, clearing the choked canals. He also chastised the nomad Arabs of the steppe between Babylonia and Syria, making the roads safe for the caravans. In the north there had been fresh movements of peoples: Scythian hordes had come down from Central Asia and established themselves in the country which is now Azerbaijan; hordes of a people called Cimmerians (remembered in Greek tradition), coming round the west of the Black Sea, had swept over Asia Minor. In that direction the armies of Ezarhaddon had been occupied in holding against the Cimmerians the provinces west of the Armenian hills.

The lure of Egypt persisted. The Jews, looking down from their hills, saw once more Assyrian armies marching along the coast, intent to cross the desert between Palestine and Egypt. And twice the old luck of Assyria, trouble at the opposite extremities of the empire, postponed the blow. One Assyrian force which found an Egyptian army in its path seems to have met with a reverse. At last in 670 the chance came. The Assyrians passed

Raphia (Rafa) on the edge of the desert. They defeated the Egyptian armies on the frontier in two bloody battles, and four days later entered Memphis. The Assyrians were in the Valley of the Nile! It was the people of the most ancient civilization in the world, cities of immemorial riches, which now had experience of Assyrian frightfulness. Memphis was sacked. Assyrian Residents were installed in the provincial chief-towns of Lower Egypt. Ezarhaddon added to his other titles that of "King of Egypt and Ethiopia." A new palace of imposing splendour, with an avenue of sphinxes, suggested by those the Assyrians had seen in Egypt, was reared in Nineveh.

It was under the son of Ezarhaddon, Assurbanipal (667-625 B.C.) that the Assyrian Empire reached its greatest extension. In Egypt there was still trouble. The Ethiopian royal house had retired up the Nile to its original dominions, out of reach of the Assyrians, who under Ezarhaddon had not conquered more than Lower Egypt; and from its capital of Napata in the Sudân it could go on fomenting unrest in Egypt, or come down to reconquer the whole country, whenever occasion offered. It was in the course of this struggle that the Assyrians, under Assurbanipal, pushed farther up the Nile. Thebes, the great capital of Upper Egypt (the site of which is now partially occupied by Luxor and Karnak), was sacked and the population carried away into captivity. The destruction of the great city of the god Amon was the sort of thing which would profoundly impress the imagina-

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tion of the whole Eastern world of the time
“No-Amon, that was situate among the rivers, that
had the waters round about her; whose rampart
was the Nile, and her wall was of the Nile. Kush
and Egypt were her strength, and it was infinite;
Put and Lubim [the Libyans] were her helpers.
Yet was she carried away. She went into captivity;
her young children were dashed to pieces at the
top of all the streets: and they cast lots for her
honourable men, and all her great men were bound
in chains” (Nah. iii.).

XIV

THE GLORY AND FALL OF ASSYRIA

UNDER Asshurbanipal another country of ancient civilization and renown was conquered—the land of Elam. Rival candidates to the Elamite throne were always intriguing against and murdering each other, and this enabled the king of Assyria to set up and pluck down kings. Asshurbanipal entered Susa as conqueror. “By the will of Asshur and Ishtar, I entered into the palaces thereof, and took my rest in them with pride. I opened their treasuries, I took the gold and the silver, their riches, all the goodly things which the first king of Elam and the kings after him had gathered together, and whereon no enemy hitherto had stretched out his hand, I took them for a spoil.” The Assyrians had at their disposal a number of

ex-kings of Elam, and these Asshurbanipal caused to be harnessed to his chariot, doing as Timur is said to have done long afterwards with captive kings.

The Assyrian Empire, when it included Babylon and Egypt and Elam, was larger than any realm which had been united under one man up to that time. But the record was soon destined to be surpassed. Before Asshurbanipal died, the power of Media, on the confines of Assyria, had grown menacingly great, and the advantage began to pass from the Semite to the Aryan. In Egypt a strong man arose, Psammetichus, who drove out the Assyrian garrisons and made Egypt free again under a Pharaoh of Egyptian blood. His success was largely due to foreign soldiers he hired from overseas, men of a people who lived about the coasts of the Ægean, and wore metal armour of a more perfect pattern. They, too, belonged to the Indo-European group of nations which had come into these parts, as we saw, some two thousand years before. The tribe of this particular Indo-European nation with which the Orientals first came into contact called themselves *Iaones*; so the Semites knew them as *Yawanîm*, or collectively *Yawan*. Our Bible transcribes the word *Javan*. The name used in the tongue of this people to designate the whole nation, of which the *Iaones* formed a part, was *Hellenes*. We shall hear more of them presently.

We have seen how the ancient civilizations, occupying only a small area on the earth's surface,

were perpetually in danger of irruptions from the vast barbarian wilderness outside. One of such visitations took place in the later years of Asshur-banipal. Scythian hordes came down through the mountains south of the Caspian, overran Media and Assyria, and swept onwards across Syria and along the coast of Palestine till they reached the desert dividing Palestine from Egypt. That was their limit. King Psammetichus saved Egypt by paying substantial blackmail. It is thought that the earlier chapters of Jeremiah, relating to "a people from the north," were written under the stress of the Scythian peril, and that the memory of it suggested to Ezekiel the form of terror whose image he throws upon the clouds of the future under the name of Gog. The curious thing about these invasions is that for a time they seem to submerge all countries and obliterate all frontiers, and in a little while the invaders have vanished and the old shapes of the kingdoms are there as before. The explanation probably is that they were mere raids for loot, which aimed at no stable conquest; that the open country and smaller towns fell a prey to them, but that the walls of the larger towns withstood their waves. Thus, when the deluge ebbed, and men came out again from behind their walls into the ravished lands, the old relations between the different settled nations were resumed. Sooner or later these wild bands became scattered and demoralized with indulgence, and then the settled peoples they had harried could turn upon them and destroy them in detail.

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The chief glory for the extermination of the Scythians was won by king Cyaxares of Media. Media arose stronger from the catastrophe than Assyria was able to do. The Scythians were gone, but in the prostration of Assyria the effect of their twenty years of ravage remained. It was before a combined attack by Media and Babylon that the Assyrian Empire fell—fell and perished utterly from the earth within the lifetime of men who had seen it at its greatest power.

A few years after the destruction of the Scythians, Babylon renounced its allegiance to Assyria. This time the national rising was led by a Chaldæan, called Nabopolassar. The Chaldæans were one of those peoples of Aramæan origin who had come east some centuries before, and had founded an independent kingdom adjoining Babylonia, on the other side of the Euphrates. From here Chaldæans had more and more penetrated Babylonia itself; they had flowed into it in such large numbers that later on the name of Chaldæan came to mean the same as Babylonian.

No doubt the assimilation of the Chaldæans and the older population of Shinar was facilitated when a Chaldæan dynasty reigned in Babylon. Each people learnt something from the other. The old gods of the land were worshipped with the old sacred forms, and the old cuneiform writing used for the various businesses of life; but the Chaldæans on their side brought with them a more elaborate star-lore, which was amalgamated henceforth with the religion of Shinar. “Chal-

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dæan " in Greco-Roman times was often used in the sense of " astrologer."*

Nabopolassar the Chaldæan made an alliance against Assyria with the king of Media, and his son Nebuchadnezzar was given a Median princess in marriage. In 608 Nineveh was taken by the Medes. The Aryan conqueror " utterly destroyed the sanctuaries of the gods of Asshur; he destroyed their holy books, and suffered not one to remain; he ravaged their cities, and laid them waste as if they had never been."

XV

MEDES AND ARMENIANS

THE old Assyrian Empire was divided between the Aryan and the Babylonian. The northern part of it was taken over by Cyaxares. The Medes crossed the hills of Ararat into those regions of Asia Minor which had once been Assyrian, and here came into collision with the kingdom which was in process of subjugating the western half of the peninsula, the kingdom of Lydia. The Lydians were another Indo-European people who had come, with the tide of Indo-European migration, into Asia Minor by way of the Balkans, centuries before, when the Aryan branch was taking possession of Irân and

* So, for instance, in the Book of Daniel. Where used in other books of the Old Testament, the term " Chaldæan " is equivalent to " Babylonian."

Northern India, and had now grown rich by traffic and the gold of the river Pactolus. Their capital city was Sardis. We can date to the day one of the battles which took place between the Medians and Lydians, because it was broken off owing to an eclipse of the sun. The date must therefore have been May 28; 585 B.C.—perhaps the first date in history we can fix with this precision.

Just about this time another Indo-European people established itself in the mountain country between the Black Sea and the Caspian, north of Lake Van, where, in Assyrian days, those old kings of Ararat had ruled, who had given the Assyrians so much trouble. This invading Indo-European people, henceforth to be the inhabitants of the country up to our own day, called themselves by the name of Hai, or in the plural Haikh. The Persians later on called them Armina, whence, through the Greeks, we derive our name of Armenians.

XVI

THE NEW BABYLONIAN KINGDOM

THE southern part of the Assyrian Empire fell to the new Chaldæan dynasty established in Babylon. It was a question of reconquest. In these last years of disorder, Cimmerian roving hordes had looted the Holy City of the Moon-god in Mesopotamia, Charrân, and the enterprising successor of Psammetichus in

Egypt, Pharaoh Necho, had conquered Palestine and Syria as far as the Euphrates, brushing aside Josiah, king of Judah, who had tried to bar his path near Megiddo (Armageddon), and setting another Jewish prince, a nominee of his own, upon the throne of Jerusalem. The Babylonian crown-prince, Nebuchadnezzar, took the field, rescued Mesopotamia, and drove the Egyptians out of Palestine. He had already crossed the desert and occupied Pelusium, the frontier town of Egypt, when the news came that his father had died. Nebuchadnezzar had to give up the invasion of Egypt and hurry back to Babylon.

Under Nebuchadnezzar (604-562 B.C.) Babylon again had a spell of power and glory. For more than a thousand years, Babylon after its first two centuries of pre-eminence had been either a subject city or had maintained only a painful and precarious independence. And this brief spell of Babylonian glory was the last blaze up of the old culture of Shinar before its final sinking. This brief spell, which might have been embraced in the lifetime of a single man, seems a mere moment when compared with the vast stretches of time which we have been disposing of in a few sentences. And yet this moment happened to coincide in time with a phase in the experience of two other peoples which were destined, more than any other two peoples then existing, to determine the future thoughts and imaginations of mankind—the Greeks and the Jews. Because the doomed civilization of Shinar, before it disappeared, impressed, in its last

manifestation, the minds of these two peoples, the name of Babylon has for subsequent generations of men embodied the ideas of worldly magnificence and luxury.

In extent the Babylonian realm under Nebuchadnezzar did not even include all the southern part of the old Assyrian Empire under Assurbanipal. Elam seems to have passed into the possession of an Aryan people, akin to the Medes, whose seat was in the mountainous region to the south-east. This people had established a little kingdom tributary to the king of Media in what is still called, after them, the province of Fârs, and had annexed Elam, broken as the native dynasty of that country had been in the last days of the Assyrian Empire. We shall hear of them again. They called themselves Parsa; their name in English, coming to us through the Greek, is Persian.

On the west, Nebuchadnezzar was unable to get into the Valley of the Nile, but he succeeded in dominating the bridge that led to it—Syria and Palestine. For a time he allowed a king of the house of David to reign in Judæa as his vassal; but the intrigues between Jerusalem and Egypt were so recurrent that, when the Babylonian armies had taken Jerusalem the second time, after an attempt of king Zedekiah's to defy his overlord, the city was laid waste, the temple built by Solomon demolished, and the population, together with the last representative of the old royal line, carried away captive to Babylon.

To the restoration of Shinar, to the repairing

of its canals and the furtherance of its prosperity, to the amplification and beautifying of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar devoted strenuous activity. The fallen temples were reared up to the sky, and inscriptions in the old tongue and the old character of the land declared that there was once more a mighty king of Babylon, who was the devoted servant of Bel and Nebo. Babylon itself was enclosed in a rectangular space of about two and a half by three miles, surrounded by an inner and outer wall. These huge walls—one of them so broad that two chariots might pass each other on the top of it—through which travellers had to go, one after the other, when they entered the city, impressed their imagination as the walls of Pekin do that of travellers to-day. The river Euphrates flowed through the midst of this rectangular space; the brick buildings of the great city filled up only part of it; part was left for gardens and corn-fields, which might help to nourish the city, if it ever had to stand a siege. Above the low expanse of common houses rose the towering temples, platform above platform, and the new buildings of Nebuchadnezzar. One of these was the complex of buildings which formed the royal palace, part on this side and part on that side of the river, connected by a subterranean passage, a little city in itself, its walls decorated with pictures of animals in bright-coloured enamel tiles, according to the national artistic tradition, and its gilded dome blazing far off under the unmitigated Babylonian sun. Connected, no doubt, with the royal palace was the artificial

mountain which the Greeks describe to us under the term "Hanging Gardens." The Median queen of Nebuchadnezzar pined, it is said, for something in this flat country to bring back to her the hills of her home. And Nebuchadnezzar made for her a mountain of brick platforms on arches, with soil deep enough to bear great trees, with fountains and streams, and, shrouded in its green profusion, dark delicious caves. The Book of Daniel depicts Nebuchadnezzar walking upon his palace roof, and saying, as he looked over the roofs of the city: "Is not this great Babylon which I have built for the royal dwelling-place, by the might of my power, and for the glory of my majesty?" (Dan. iv. 30).

Even when politically subject, Babylon had, no doubt, been the economic capital of this rich and central country, in which lines of traffic from the north and from Arabia, from India and from the Mediterranean west, united. Here always men of many races and tongues met and mingled—a veritable *Babel*. In one quarter of Babylon, traversed by the "Royal Street," the big commercial firms had their houses of business and their warehouses alongside the Pikudu Canal. Some three or four thousand clay tablets, which are now in the hands of our scholars, are the books of the great firm of Egibi and Sons, which dealt in landed property, the produce of Babylonia, and slaves. We can trace their business operations and the growth of their wealth from the days of Nabopolassar, over a hundred years.

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Within thirty years after the death of Nebuchadnezzar, the sceptre had passed from the old civilization of Shinar for ever.

XVII

AN EPOCH IN HISTORY

THE sixth century B.C. is one of the great dividing times in human history. It was the end of a world thousands of years old, and the beginning of a new world. In our survey we have seen change in the Land of the Two Rivers, and in the land of the Nile, but through all change the old culture has still been dominant. And now altogether new powers are to have dominion. In Western Asia the Indo-European is to supersede the Semite as ruler for centuries to come. All over the known earth that century was one of great new beginnings. In China it was the time of Confucius, in India the time of Buddha; in Europe it was the time when the Hellenic people had come to full consciousness of itself, and its genius first stood out as the distinct thing it was.

If an observer had looked round the world as it was about 550 B.C., he could not have guessed which, out of its multitude of races and peoples, were to have the greatest share in determining the future of mankind. We, looking back to-day, can point to four peoples, but how disparate in importance they seemed then! One of the four, the

Aryan people of Irân, was already great and powerful, and yet all the other three would count for more in the long-run.

The one of whom the Central Man of human history was to come seemed then to count for almost nothing at all—a small community dragged from their Jydæan hills, to be discerned in little clusters beside the Babylonian canals in the shade of the willow-trees, keening strange mournful songs in memory of their home. Scribes amongst them were writing on parchment rolls the laws of their people, given them, they said, long ago by some one called Moses. Outside this insignificant community, no one in those days through the length and breadth of Nearer Asia had ever heard of Moses.

Another of the four races was settled in a large number of separate self-governing cities in the southern part of the Balkan Peninsula and along the pleasant western coasts of Asia Minor, also in the islands and at other points round about the Mediterranean, in Italy and Sicily, in Southern Gaul and Spain, in Northern Africa and the Black Sea. They certainly had more importance than the little exiled community in Babylonia; but they could hardly come into consideration, scattered and divided as they were in minute city-states, as a power to be set beside the great kingdoms of Media, or Lydia, or Babylon, or Egypt. The peoples of the East knew them, as we saw, under the name of Yawanîm, or, in Persia, Yavana, and thought of them, not as people possessing any particular

pre-eminence of intellect but as mercenary soldiers, as the best fighting men that could be got. The reigning dynasty in Egypt had come to rely more upon its Greek mercenary troops than upon the native soldiery, and Pharaoh Necho sent the corslet he wore at the battle of Megiddo, where he overthrew the Jewish king Josiah, as an offering to the Greek Apollo of Miletus. We can point out among the foreign troops of Nebuchadnezzar a man of Javan, who distinguished himself in some war by killing a man of gigantic stature in single combat. The Babylonian king gave him in recompense a sword with an ivory hilt to carry home. His home was in the island of Lesbos, now called Mitylene, and he is especially interesting to us because he has a brother Alcæus, who makes poetry (of course Nebuchadnezzar knows nothing about that), and boys at English schools in the twentieth century A.D. read bits of that poetry, or at any rate imitations of it composed later on by the Roman poet Horace.

The fourth race was the Arab people away to the south in its hot, dry land—primitive nomads of whom nothing great could be expected. It was not, indeed, for more than a thousand years to come that the Arabs would play any conspicuous rôle in human history.

. XVIII

CYRUS THE PERSIAN

ALREADY during the first half of the sixth century B.C. the peoples of Asia, as has been said, might see in the Median Empire stretching from the plateau of Irân to the centre of Asia Minor a great Aryan power. In the middle of the century a change took place which you may describe either as the overthrow of the Median Empire or as its transformation and enlargement. It was the overthrow of the dynasty reigning in Ecbatana, but the man who overthrew it was not altogether an alien. He was the king of the Persians, of that little Aryan kingdom to the south-west of Media, which, as we saw, had absorbed Elam. His name was Kurush—as the Latins wrote it, Cyrus—and, according to one tradition, his mother was a daughter of the king of Media. His house was called by the name of one of his ancestors, Hachamanish (Achæmenes), whence to-day we ordinarily call this dynasty of Persian kings the Achæmenian dynasty.

Cyrus may be regarded as the first of those conquerors on a vast scale, of whom Asia has seen a succession over the ages. His Persians were of a kindred stock to the Medes, but in their highland home they had remained simpler and hardier than the Medes, who had taken on the trappings and luxury of Nineveh and Babylon. As soon as Cyrus

had seized the Median throne, had become king of the Medes as well as king of the Persians and king of Elam, he found himself possessed of an empire which by the standard of previous empires was a large one. ' The rest of his life was spent in making it larger. It was in 550, as scholars reckon, that Cyrus took his seat as king of the Medes and Persians at Ecbatana. The other Powers of the world felt themselves menaced by the growth of the Iranian Power and formed an *entente* against it—Lydia and Egypt and Babylon. In 546 Cyrus took Sardis and put an end to the Lydian kingdom. The Persian Empire now extended the whole length of Asia Minor right up to the Ionian coast, with its fringe of Greek cities. After this Cyrus turned eastwards, and from 545 to 539 he was fighting and conquering in what are now the Russian provinces of Bokhara and Merv and Transcaspia, in Afghanistan and Beluchistan. The inhabitants of these countries were largely of kindred Iranian stock. Then Cyrus descended upon Babylonia. Nabunaid, who, although not apparently of the family of Nebuchadnezzar, now sat upon the throne of Babylon, was taken prisoner, and the land of Shinar became a Persian province (538 B.C.). Egypt was left as the last great Power of the old world; but before Cyrus had his hands free for attacking Egypt, he was involved in fresh wars in Central Asia, and died, or fell fighting against a people of the wilderness, somewhere near the banks of the Syr-darya (529 B.C.).

His son Cambyzes in his short reign (529-521 B.C.)

carried out the conquest of Egypt. Then, after the brief usurpation of an impostor supported by the Median priesthood, the Persian crown passed to another branch of the Achæmenian family—to Darius, the son of Hystaspes (521-485 B.C.).

XIX

THE PERSIAN EMPIRE UNDER DARIUS

IF Cyrus had been the creator of the Persian Empire, Darius was its organizer. He had hard work for many years to beat down the rebellious national chiefs or ambitious Iranian princes over the vast extent of territory newly brought under the Persian King of kings. The system of imperial government, the division into provinces, the apportionment of tribute, was afterwards regarded as the work of Darius. In one direction Darius attempted a notable extension of the frontiers of the Empire. His armies crossed the Bosphorus into Europe, made Macedonia tributary, and pressed northward through what is now Bulgaria and Roumania, across the Danube, into the plains of Southern Russia. But this expedition was a failure, and the Persian armies had to retreat south again with loss. Darius retained, however, his hold on Thrace and Macedonia.

So now there was a single monarchy in the earth which at one extremity touched the Balkan Mountains, and at the other extremity the banks of the

Indus; at one extremity the cataract of the Nile, and at the other extremity the Syr-darya—an aggregation of power such as no previous age had dreamed of under the hand 'of one man. Under his supremacy the subject peoples were allowed, so long as they complied with his demand for tribute and supplied their prescribed quota of men to his armies, to live very much their own life and manage their own affairs. Indeed, in days when communications were so primitive, the centralization which would be possible to a modern empire was out of the question, even though the Persian government established a system of couriers along the main roads of the Empire to keep the outlying parts in continuous communication with the capitals. A country like Asia Minor was left to be governed partly by native chiefs, partly by Iranian governors who had their own castles in the country, and reigned within their own spheres almost as independent kings. The ordinary principle of the Persian government was not to interfere directly in the internal affairs of the subject communities; it was satisfied as long as the persons in power there were nominees of its own or of assured loyalty. The Greek cities, for instance, on the coast of Asia Minor were largely under Greek "tyrants" approved by the Persian government, and replaced by others if their loyalty proved unstable.

We can see an instance of the same thing in Judæa. For, when Babylonia passed under Cyrus, permission was given to any who would of the

Jewish exiles to go home again and build a new temple to Yahweh. Some part of the community took advantage of this. A temple rose again on the old site, and gradually a new Jewish city gathered around it. It had its own elders to administer its affairs, and when the Persian king sent a governor, or imperial commissioner, to Judæa, he chose a man from among the Babylonian Jews, Nehemiah.

The burden of the Persian rule was felt by the subject peoples only as they were squeezed for tribute, in money or kind, by the imperial officials, or saw their young men haled away to fight, perhaps to die, for the Great King in far-off countries, or had to support an imperial garrison. In the Land of the Two Rivers a great deal of the old life went on unchanged. Men still transacted their commercial and legal affairs by means of clay tablets inscribed with the old cuneiform script, the manufacture of goodly Babylonish garments still occupied hundreds of brown hands, and the old temples were left to the native priesthoods. Under a king of a different religion, who might occasionally even lay hands on the treasures of the god, and a priesthood which sometimes thought more of their individual profit than the god's honour, one gathers that the Babylonian temples wore a somewhat decayed aspect under Achæmenian rule; but the old religion went on, and the sacred lore of myth and ritual, of magic and astrology, was handed on from generation to generation. Babylon still was a great centre of commerce, the hive of a greater multitude of men than could be seen elsewhere—

“the dimensions of a nation,” wrote a Greek philosopher, “more than of a city”—full of industry and traffic and religion and sensuality. Babylon was still, in a way, the capital of the world. The alluvial Land of the Two Rivers, so rich, so populous, so central, could not lose its prerogative simply because the government of the world had passed to another people. Babylon was, as a matter of fact, the winter capital of the Persian Empire. It was in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar, beside his Hanging Gardens, that the Persian court resided during the winter months, and it was to Babylon that the envoys from all lands came, who would have audience at that season of the King of kings. We are told that the regular practice of the Achæmenian court was to remove in spring to the old capital of Elam, to Susa (“Shushan the palace”), and then, when the hot season came, to go still higher up to its native Iranian tableland, to Persepolis in Fârs, or to the Median capital, Ecbatana, with its splendid palace of cedar

XX

THE RELIGION OF ZOROASTER

WHAT exactly the religion of Cyrus and of the Achæmenian kings from Darius onwards was is not quite certain. The Babylonian cylinder inscribed for Cyrus after his capture of Babylon represents him as a devoted servant of Bel. But

although in the inscription Cyrus speaks himself in the first person, it was no doubt drawn up by the Babylonian priests, and perhaps Cyrus, as a matter of policy, allowed them to represent him as a worshipper of their god. We do not know how much he understood himself of what was on the cylinder in the old Akkadian tongue.

Generations before, the prophet Zarathushtra (in the Greek form of the name, Zoroaster) had arisen in Irân and taught a new religion. It was nearer to the religion of Israel than anything else we have outside Israel. It knew only of one God, and laid stress on truth and righteousness. It saw a war always going on in the world between Good and Evil, between God and the Lie. And it taught a life to come when men would be rewarded or punished according to their works. Pre-eminent among good works was honest agriculture, rescuing land from desolation (which in that country is always so close at hand), and redeeming it for fruitfulness, taking good care of the stocks of cattle, driving back the marauding tribes of the wilderness, the servants of Evil. The Iranians, to whom Zarathushtra came, already, it would seem, knew Ahura Mazda, the Great Spirit, as the supreme God; but they had besides a mass of primitive pagan worships, gods and goddesses, the old Aryan god Mithra amongst them. Zarathushtra's teaching purged out all this; it gave, instead of it, a simple, purified, strongly moral religion for a patriarchal society of farmers. But when Zarathushtra was dead, and his religion spread through

the land, it began to absorb the paganism he had discarded, and became adulterated with all sorts of baser elements. It took in not only gods like Mithra, but the Sumerian-Semitic goddess of sensuality, Ishtar, whom the Iranians named Anahita. This amalgam of the original doctrine of the prophet and old paganism itself later on underwent a process of theological reform and dogmatic schematization, long after the Achæmenian time, and this is the form of the religion shown to us in the sacred books of the Parsees. It seems made out that the Achæmenian kings—at any rate from Darius onwards—were Zoroastrians of a sort. But their religion was plainly neither the pure doctrine of Zarathushtra nor the later Zoroastrianism. We have not material for determining the precise amount of the prophet's doctrine and the precise amount of old Iranian paganism which went to compose it.

But even if the Zoroastrianism of the Achæmenian court and the Persian aristocracy was of an adulterated quality, there was apparently enough of the Zoroastrian principle in it to make it morally and spiritually superior to the polytheistic religions of Asia. For Darius, to judge by his inscriptions, the one figure of Ahura Mazda, the Great Spirit, fills the sky—a God of Righteousness—and Darius is His servant in fighting the Lie, wherever it raises its head. The Iranian aristocracy, at home on the tableland of Irân or in those eastern hills of Bactria and Sogdiana, where they had rock-built ancestral castles, or scattered over the western provinces of

the Empire as a ruling race, constituted a society with gallant and chivalrous traditions, devoted to horsemanship and archery, to the chase of big game, to gardening and agriculture, but despising commerce. Their ideal of conduct at any rate was a noble one, in so far as untruth was for them the cardinal sin; and even if practice, in their case as in the case of all men, fell below ideal, a high ideal no doubt tended to lift practice.

To the polytheistic religions of their subjects they seem generally to have shown indifference. There was no systematic attempt (as with the later Zoroastrianism) to suppress idolatry, though Xerxes did not mind burning Greek temples or pillaging Babylonian ones as a measure of punishment. In the case of a land like Babylonia, the fact that it had passed under the rule of a Power which did not care for its ancient gods made the Persian conquest a more fundamental breach with the past than any conquest through the millenniums before, by Amorites or Cossæans, by Elamites or Assyrians.

XXI

THEHELLENES

AT its extreme western fringe the Persian Empire, as we have seen, was in contact with the Yavana. This set up a permanent trouble. The people of those city-states always felt it a bitter thing that they should not be "free," and that meant that

each several city-state ought to be an absolutely sovereign community, with no superior over it but its gods and its civic law. They had an inextinguishable will to rebel. And across on the other side of the Ægean were their kinsmen in the Balkan Peninsula, in the mother-country of the race, called in an especial sense Hellas; and the Asiatic Greeks were always encouraged and strengthened in rebellion by help sent from one or more of the Greek cities over the water. From the outset the meeting of these long-separated cousins, the Iranian conquerors and the republican Yavana of the Mediterranean, had meant antagonism. Cyrus, after the overthrow of Lydia, with half the known world at his feet, had been met by a message from a little Yavana town west of the Ægean, called Sparta, and told not to lay his hands on any Greek city, as the Spartans would not suffer it. Cyrus inquired who these Spartans were, and decided that they were not formidable. Darius and his son Xerxes thought, quite naturally, that the only way of quelling the unrest at this extremity of the Empire was to crush the Greeks of the mother-land—a comparatively easy task, surely, for an Empire such as theirs. But the expeditions sent by Darius miscarried; one force which landed on the coast of Attica was beaten back to its ships by the people of a particularly obnoxious Yavana city called Athens (490 B.C.); and when Xerxes himself led a much larger army round into Greece by way of Thrace and Macedonia, it met with hideous disaster. Amongst the dead bodies left lying on the field of

Plataea (479 B.C.) were some from as far away as India, men dragged across half Asia by the King's officers from hills whose waters ran down to the Indus, to end their marching for ever by the banks of the Greek Asopus.

After this the Persian kings made no more attempts to conquer European Hellas. They had even to resign themselves for a generation or two after the failure of Xerxes to see the Greek cities of the Asiatic seaboard break away from their Empire under the protection of the maritime league led by Athens. Presently they discovered a way of frustrating the hostility of the Yavanas of Greece, and that was by fomenting the mutual jealousies and enmities of the Greek cities, playing off, according to the age-long methods of Oriental diplomacy one against the other, judiciously supporting with Persian gold the antagonist of any Greek state which proved troublesome. Greek envoys might be seen intriguing against each other in Babylon or Susa. By such means the Persian kings ultimately brought the Asiatic Greeks again under their dominion, again compelled them to pay tribute and lodged garrisons in their cities. Yet even so these coast-lands were not safe from being raided, if occasion offered, by the leaders of Greek armies, and rebellious Persian satraps in the west could always get the use of Greek mercenaries. The brother of Artaxerxes II. almost got possession of the throne by means of an army of Greek mercenaries with which he came down the Euphrates as far as a point opposite Baghdad (401 B.C.). The

Yavanas were, in fact, a continual irritation and element of unrest on the western fringe of the Empire, worse even than the Central-Asiatic hordes who gave trouble on the extreme east, or contumacious hill-peoples like the Cossæans, to whom the Great King himself had to pay blackmail when he went through their mountain country on his way up from Babylonia to Persepolis.

We to-day, who look back upon the life of those little Hellenic states, which seemed so troublesome from the standpoint of Babylon and Susa, know that something was going on there in the minds of men destined to be of greater significance for the future of mankind than anything going on anywhere else in the Great King's dominions, except in the little community clustered round its temple on the grey Judæan hills. Men in these Greek cities were beginning new trains of thought, of which what we call "Western civilization" to-day, with its vast command over material Nature, is the continuation. They were beginning to emancipate their minds, as no people had hitherto done, from tradition and custom, and apply to things a new standard of rational criticism. Thales, of Miletus, one of the Greek cities of the Asiatic coast, a little time before Cyrus, had set out to get a physical, instead of the traditional mythological, explanation of the origin of the world; and he said it was all really made of water more or less condensed—a rather blind first shot, of course, but it was the starting-point from which the whole of modern science has come. The Greeks began thinking, too,

about the ideas people had of good and bad in the matter of conduct and in the organization of states: it was not enough any longer to say simply, "This is the tradition of our fathers"; they raised the question, "What really, from the point of view of reason, is the best?" This way of thinking had in it the promise of continuous improvement and progress. The Greeks, besides, were beginning, as artists, to look at Nature with different eyes, to be able to represent things, and especially the human form, more truly and yet more ideally. Within its limited sphere Greek art attained a perfection which remains unsurpassable. And from the combination of their perception of reality, their intellectual activity, and their sense of beauty, the Greeks were producing, during the days of the Persian Empire, the best things in that great literature which is the foundation of our own. All these activities of mind had their basis in a moral temper characteristic of the citizens of the Greek states—a moral temper to some extent associated with a narrow and jealous patriotism, which abhorred the idea of its own little state having its sovereign independence restricted by any inclusion in a larger whole, but which at the same time gave the Greeks a sense of dignity as free men, and made them feel themselves superior to the Asiatics, whom they saw prostrating themselves on the ground before their human rulers, a thing which the Greeks would never do except before the images of the gods.*

* It was no doubt due to the Greek associations with the form of prostration that the Greeks got the idea that the

All this that made up Greek life—its moral outlook, its new rationalism, its art and literature—we include in the term Hellenism. And we may say that on the day when the envoy from Sparta stood before Cyrus in Sardis a long conflict was opened for the possession of Western Asia, a conflict destined to last for more than a thousand years, between the two principles which these two men represented, between Hellas and Irân. The Persian kings of the Achæmenian house cannot, of course, have realized, till quite the end of the dynasty, that Hellenism would ever dispute their possession of Asia. Troublesome as the Yavanas were, they were too far off and too disunited. They could at most tear away some butlying provinces from the huge body of the Empire, but they could not be put on the same footing, as a Power, with the Iranian rulers of the world.

To some extent the Persians did recognize a special value in the culture of the Yavana. Greek physicians were retained by handsome fees at the Persian court. It was especially among the Iranian nobles, who had castles in Asia Minor and were in closer contact with the Greeks, that interest was created in the new ideas current among this people. We hear of a Mithridates who presented the Platonic school at Athens with a statue of the master, and

Persian king was worshipped by his subjects as a god. The Persian kings never claimed to be more than the servants of Ahura Mazda. It was the degenerate Greeks themselves who introduced into Hellenistic Asia the practice of deifying kings.

he is probably the same man who received by vote of the Athenian people, together with his father Ariobarzanes, the citizenship of Athens. But this did not mean that the Persians thought of the Greeks as a Power which would challenge their supremacy in Asia. In Greece, in the earlier half of the fourth century B.C., the idea began to be in the air that it was only the disunion of the Greeks which prevented their superiority in quality from giving them the empire of the world. A definite Panhellenic propaganda came into existence for the purpose of uniting all the Greeks in a national war against Persia. The pamphleteer Isocrates pointed to the king of Macedonia as the man obviously fitted to be the head of the league. Macedonia was a monarchy whose people were akin to the Greeks in blood, and whose ruling class to a large extent had been Hellenized.

XXII

ALEXANDER THE GREAT

BETWEEN 334 and 323 more than Isocrates can ever have dreamed of was realized. A Macedonian king at the head of his own Macedonians and of the forces of the Greek states conquered the whole Achæmenian Empire. He even went beyond it by conquering the Panjab and Sind. Towards the end of his reign Alexander seemed to have determined to give his Empire a mixed Hellenistic and Iranian

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character. He showed special favour to the Iranian aristocracy, and by a system of mixed marriages tried to fuse Iranians and Macedonians. He himself chose for his queen a princess from Eastern Irân (Afghanistan). On some state occasions he wore a Persian dress. But, pupil of Aristotle as he was, he continued to set a high value upon Hellenic science and art, and he designed at the critical points of the ways of communication all over the Empire a system of new cities of Hellenistic type with a predominant population of Macedonians or Greeks. The capital of the Empire was still apparently to be Babylon; the alluvial Land of the Two Rivers seemed its natural centre. It was here that in 323, after his return from India, Alexander was planning vast new schemes of conquest and development, which included the digging of new basins to improve the irrigation system of Babylonia and the clearing of the Tigris for navigation. It was here that in the midst of his schemes he was struck down, still young, by the hand of death, beside the Euphrates, in the enamelled palace of Nebuchadnezzar.

XXIII

HELLENISM UNDER THE SELEUCIDS

IN the first phase of the conflict between Hellenism and Iranianism, under the Achæmenian kings, Iranianism is in possession of the whole of Western

Asia, with Hellenism only a disturbing factor on the fringe. Then, by the sudden reversal brought about by Alexander, Hellenism, in the second phase of the conflict, is seen in turn supreme over the whole. The third phase is the gradual recovery of ground by Iranianism during the time of the Greco-Macedonian dynasties, which inherited Alexander's Empire. After the forty years of struggle, more or less chaotic, between Alexander's Macedonian marshals, which followed the conqueror's premature death, three kingdoms are left as the result. One of these consists of Macedonia and Thrace; another is the kingdom founded by Ptolemy—Egypt and Palestine; and the third is the Empire won by Seleucus—all the Asiatic dominions of the old Persian Empire, Palestine excepted. The gradual decay and break-up of the Seleucid Empire occupied the next three centuries.

In one way Hellenism, under the Seleucid kings, was not losing, but gaining. The Empire, it is true, lost province after province to Iranian or native dynasties, as time went on; but meanwhile the founding of Greek cities over Asia or the transformation of older cities to the Hellenistic type—the work initiated by Alexander—went forward. Also Hellenism—its language, its standard of life, its thought and art—was diffused farther and sank deeper among the Asiatic peoples of the Empire. Even in the Iranian courts which superseded the Seleucid rule in the several regions, there was a more or less strong alloy of Hellenism.

In Babylonia, Seleucus finally destroyed the old

Babylon; or, if you like to put it so, he shifted it to another site sixty-three miles away. He built a new city on the Tigris, called after him Seleucia. There were many Seleucias all over his dominions. This one was the greatest; it was distinguished as Seleucia-on-the-Tigris. It was the capital of the eastern half of the Empire, in closer communication than the Syrian Antioch could be with the Iranian tableland. Of course, population drifted away from the old Babylon to the new city. Amidst increasing desolation, no doubt, little communities of priests kept up the old ritual at the tower-temples which had overlooked the city of Nebuchadnezzar, and which were left to a slow decay. Seleucia prided itself on being a Greek city; three hundred years after its foundation, when it had long passed under Parthian rule, a Roman writer speaks of it as "proof against barbarian influences and mindful of its founder." From it the light of a new civilization radiated out over the canals and gardens of the old land of Shinar. One of the principal Stoi writers, Diogenes, head of the Stoic school at Athens in 156 B.C., was a "Babylonian"—i.e., a citizen of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris. Native Babylonians, too, got Hellenistic education; one, a Babylonian priest called Berossus, wrote a history of his country in Greek for Antiochus I., the son of Seleucus. A celebrated mathematician and astronomer, Seleucus, who taught, before Copernicus, that the earth and other planets moved round the sun, was probably a native Babylonian.

If in the last two centuries B.C. we had taken

the road from Seleucia to Media or Fârs, we should have passed through city after city with a population in part Greek, with Greek as its official language, with public buildings in the Greek style, Greek schools and gymnasia and theatres. We still have a decree passed about 206 B.C., by the city of Antioch in the south-western hills of Persia, which shows all the normal political machinery of a Greek city in the working. We see these Greek cities, outposts of Hellenism, carrying on a brisk diplomatic intercourse with each other, and sending their athletes to compete in the great games of Greece. One may notice, among the Greek cities of Babylonia, Artemita, in the now forlorn country traversed by British forces between Baghdad and Khanikin, from which the historian Apollodorus came, who was the standard authority for Parthian history at the time of the Christian era.

Of course, if Hellenism after Alexander had gained enormously in extent, it had lost a great deal in quality. The life of these Greek cities scattered over Asia was, no doubt, a very poor shadow of the life of Athens in the days of Plato, and the great creative epoch of Hellenism was over. Still, the Greek language and literature contained, if it did not increase or expand, a body of ideas, of standards of judgment, of intellectual interests, which the Asiatic peoples generally felt as something higher than what they had in their native traditions,

XXIV

DISINTEGRATION OF THE SELEUCID EMPIRE, AND
• THE RISE OF THE PARTHIANS

THE break-up of the Seleucid Empire, as has been said, took the best part of three centuries. On the east, Seleucus, the founder, had to cede Alexander's Indian provinces to the Indian king Chandragupta, who was himself the builder of a new Empire in India, with its centre at Patna on the Ganges. There Chandragupta built a palace in the style, as we know by recent excavations, of the Persian Great Kings. The farther provinces of Irân (Bactria and Sogdiana, covering what is now Northern Afghanistan and Bokhara) broke away about 255 B.C. under Greek kings of their own. (This Hellenism of the Far East maintained itself amid "barbarian" races, almost entirely cut off from the main body of Hellenism, for more than two centuries. The last traces of it are the coins belonging to about the time of the Christian era. It had established a momentary predominance in the interval over a great part of Northern India, where the Yavanas got a name in Sanskrit literature as "viciously fighting Yonas." The Greek king Menander became a Buddhist, and figures in Buddhist sacred literature as king Millinda.) In 248 B.C. the province of Parthia (modern Khorassan) was invaded by a people of the steppe, akin in race to the Iranians, and their leader Arsaces set up an

independent dynasty which kept on growing at the expense both of Seleucids and Bactrian Greeks. The dynasty professed some form of Zoroastrianism, and thus sought to present itself to the people of Irân as representing the national cause against the Europeans; but the Persians never looked upon the Arsacids, with their nomad blood, as true Persian kings. The Arsacid kingdom in Parthia first absorbed the neighbouring Hyrcania, the forest country on the northern slopes of the Elburz range towards the Caspian (modern Mazanderan); then, under its king Mithridates I. (about 170-138 B.C.), it won most of Eastern Irân from the Bactrian Greeks. Under the same king it pushed back the Seleucid power from Media. For Babylonia in the following years the struggle swayed to and fro. It was still Seleucid in 144 B.C., before 140 it had apparently been occupied by the Parthians. In that year it was recovered by a Seleucid king. But two years later an inscription written in the old cuneiform script gives its master as Arsaces.* It was recovered a second time by the last strong Seleucid king, Antiochus Sidetes, in 130, who even followed up the Parthians and drove them out of Western Irân. There the following year he was defeated and killed, and the Parthians returned for good to Babylonia. They took fearful vengeance on the city of Seleucia, which had naturally espoused the cause of the Greek royal house.

From now for four centuries the Parthian king-

* All the Parthian kings used Arsaces as a royal name beside their own personal name.

dom, possessed of Irân and Babylonia, was the great Power of the East. The regions it had conquered had been covered, as we saw, with Greek cities, and in this way Hellenism survived for many generations in the lost provinces under "barbarian" rule. We may believe that the trade of the Parthian kingdom was largely in Greek hands, and the later Parthian kings showed their sense of the importance of the Greek element by regularly adopting (or accepting) the surname of Philhellene. But however much the Arsacids might try by such means to gain the hearts of their Greek subjects, the Hellenes of the East were always ready to welcome a European invader.

XXV

ARMENIA

NORTH of Mesopotamia was the mountain land of Armenia. It had been one of the provinces of Alexander's Empire. Under the earlier Seleucids we find it ruled by a local Persian dynasty, independent or tributary to the Seleucid king according to the circumstances of the moment. After this dynasty had come to an end somewhere about 200 B.C., the country was ruled for a time on behalf of the Seleucid king by two governors with Iranian names. They must have been either offshoots of the Iranian aristocracy or native Armenians. In 190, the Seleucid Empire having sustained in its encounter with Rome the shattering

reverse of Magnesia, the two governors of Armenia, Artaxias and Zariadris, divided the country between them as independent kings. Artaxias built himself a new capital, Artaxatâ, in the valley of the Araxes (modern Aras), which had been laid out for him, according to the story, by the great Hannibal, then a wandering fugitive. From now, except for one brief moment, when Antiochus Epiphanes made Artaxias pay tribute, Armenia was lost to the Seleucids. In 83 B.C. the king of the line of Artaxias was Tigranes. He suppressed the neighbouring dynasty of Zariadris, and united under his sovereignty all that had been the original Persian province of Armenia. Thence he went on to conquer Mesopotamia from the Parthians.

XXVI

. DYNASTIES IN ASIA MINOR

IN Asia Minor, as we saw, different Persian noble families had established themselves in domains of their own under the Achæmenian kings. In the days of confusion after the death of Alexander, two of these families carved kingdoms for themselves out of the territory which had been a few years before organized as a Macedonian province. One of the dynasties was that whose princes bore the name of Ariarathes; they became kings in the inland plain of Cappadocia, south of the Iris valley. This region, as we have seen, had once been under Assyria. Its inhabitants then belonged

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to the two races called in our Bibles Meshech and Tubal (Moschi and Tibareni in Greek). Under the Persian Empire they had become a race of serfs, tilling the lands of the Iranian nobles, priestly and lay, who had divided up Cappadocia into great estates and built their burghs and castles in the land. The other dynasty established itself in northern mountainous Cappadocia, the country later on called Pontus, because it lay along the coast of the Black Sea. The founder of this dynasty bore the name of Mithridates; he was the son, apparently, of the Mithridates who, in the days of the Persian Empire, had given a statue of Plato to the Athenian Academy. His power in the northern valleys was solidly established within forty years of Alexander's death.

The establishment of these two Persian dynasties in Asia Minor no doubt represents a certain re-assertion of the Iranian element against the Greek. Yet the relations between the Seleucid court and the courts of Pontus and Cappadocia were usually friendly. With both houses the Seleucids contracted marriage alliances. The two Persian dynasties on their side largely took on the colour of the predominant culture, and conformed in their externals to the usual type of the Hellenistic courts of the time. The Pontic court was the first to admit Hellenism in large measure; it was in closer contact with the Greek cities of the Black Sea coast, such as Trapezus, Sinope, and Heraclea. The Cappadocian court was more out of the world and primitive; the full opening of it to Hellenistic culture

was due, we are told, to a Seleucid princess who was given in marriage to Ariarathes IV. about 200 B.C.

In the north-western corner of Asia Minor, in Bithynia, a land of pine-clad hills, a native dynasty had established itself under the Achæmenian kings—not an Iranian one in this case, but a really native one, belonging by blood to the Bithynian people, a rude, still primitive branch of the Indo-European stock, near cousins to the Thracians on the other side of the Bosphorus. In the times of confusion after the death of Alexander, the Bithynian chief assumed the style of a king. In the early days of Seleucid rule, Nicomedes, king of Bithynia (about 280-250), carried through the transformation of the Bithynian court to the approved Hellenistic pattern. His coins show him like a Hellenistic king, clean-shaven* and crowned with the simple band. He founded the new city of Nicomedia, on an inlet of the Sea of Marmora, which was afterwards one of the great cities of the Roman Empire and whose name survives truncated in the Turkish *Is-mid*.

Yet a fourth dynasty we find established in the peninsula by the time the Seleucid Empire is formed—this time a Greek dynasty, whose kings bear the name of Attalus or Eumenes, with Pergamon for its

* Alexander the Great set the fashion of shaving clean in the Greek world. After him it was the fashion of the classical world (of the Greeks from the time of Alexander, and of the Romans from the end of the Punic wars), till beards came in again with the Antonine Roman emperors, in the second century A.D.

centre. The Pergamene kings are as a rule on terms of hostility with the Seleucids. Their power expands in the peninsula, or contracts, according as the Seleucid king is weak or strong. Their aim is to show at Pergamon a Hellénism of a purer, a more Attic type than could be seen at semi-Oriental Antioch. When the Roman power began to reach to Asia, Pergamon ranged itself stoutly with Rome. After the battle of Magnesia (190 B.C.), when the Seleucid king, Antiochus III. ("the Great"), was compelled to give up the whole of his dominions in Asia Minor, except Cilicia, the Romans made them over to the Attalids. The last Attalid king, Attalus III., died in 153 B.C., and left his kingdom by testament to the Roman people; it became a Roman province under the name of "Asia." In this way Rome began to be an Asiatic as well as a European Power.

Along the southern part of the peninsula of Asia Minor runs the chain of the Taurus Mountains. These were inhabited by fighting highland peoples, over whom the Seleucid king could never get more than a precarious authority. What, therefore, the Seleucid Empire effectively possessed in Asia Minor from 280 to 190 B.C. was (not counting the Cilician plain, which, being south of the Taurus, was regarded as belonging to Syria rather than to Asia Minor) never more than a strip through the middle, between the Taurus Mountains on the south and the Cappadocian, Pontic, and Bithynian kingdoms on the north. Through this strip ran the great highway which connected the Greek ports of the western

coast with Syria and Mesopotamia by way of Sardis, the capital of the Seleucid government in Asia Minor. The Seleucid king also exercised a shifting authority over more or fewer of the Greek cities of the coast, but here he had to compete with the sea-power of Egypt, as well as struggle with the house of Attalus, and the cities' own desires for independence.

All this makes the picture of Asia Minor in the days of Seleucid rule rather complicated and changeful. The confusion is rendered worse by the great irruption of Gauls—or, as the Greeks called them, Galatians—who swept down over the Balkans into Greece and Asia Minor in the years 280 to 277 B.C. This was another of those waves of invasion from the barbarian world outside, from which the ancient civilizations suffered, as we have said, all through their existence, an invasion like that of the Cimmerians and Scythians centuries before, and that of the Goths and Vandals centuries later. For a time all the open country in Western Asia Minor was overrun and pillaged by these Celts—great strapping men of the north, sometimes naked and sometimes cased in a strange garb, shirts and trousers of many colours, plaids brooched at the shoulder, and straw-coloured hair stiffened with grease till it stood up like the bristles of a satyr. All the kings, princes, and cities of Asia Minor battled or parleyed with these hordes, till at last they were rounded up and driven together into the interior, where they were allowed to settle over part of what had been Phrygia, to make there a

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new country of Galatïa under native chiefs, round about the cities of Ancyra (modern Angora) and Pessinus.

XXVII

SELEUCID AND PTOLEMY: THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

To the south the Seleucid dominion met that of the other great Macedonian dynasty which had arisen out of the break-up of Alexander's empire—the realm of Ptolemy. In the partition of the provinces after Alexander's death, Ptolemy, one of the ablest and most sagacious of his Macedonian marshals, had chosen Egypt. For one thing Egypt was rich, but for another thing the desert which intervened between the Nile Delta and Palestine made it singularly defensible. This characteristic turned to Ptolemy's benefit in the days of confusion. First, when Perdiccas, the regent of the Empire, led an army against Egypt to crush him, he failed three times to cross the easternmost arm of the Nile, and was killed by a mutiny in his own army (321 B.C.). Again in 306, Antigonus, at that time the most powerful of the competing Macedonian chiefs, tried to invade Egypt from Palestine, and again the attack failed on the frontiers. But it seemed, unfortunately, necessary to Ptolemy to hold Cyprus and Palestine too, as an appendix to Egypt. Partly, perhaps, because in that way he could have his hand on the trade route which

went from the Persian Gulf to Gaza, but mainly because for his navy he needed big timber—one of the things Egypt did not furnish, but in which the Lebanon and Cyprus were rich in those days. By occupying Palestine he adventured himself, of course, outside his Egyptian fastness. The first Ptolemy, cautious and tenacious as he was, occupied the country whenever a favourable moment offered in the days of confusion, and evacuated it again swiftly whenever there was a dangerous threat of attack. On the occasion of one of his forward moves he found his way barred near the southern frontier of Palestine by an army under the young Demetrius, the brilliant son of Antigonus, and shattered it in the momentous battle of Gaza (312 B.C.). At the death of Seleucus (281 B.C.) Ptolemy II. was in possession of Palestine. But it was claimed by the house of Seleucus, and the question of Palestine was henceforth a permanent ground of antagonism between the two Macedonian dynasties, just as it had been between the old Pharaonic Egypt and the kings of Asshur and Babylon centuries before.

Throughout most of the third century B.C. Palestine remained under the Ptolemies. In two campaigns (219 and 218 B.C.) which we can still follow, thanks to Polybius, with a fair amount of detail, the young king, Antiochus III. ("the Great"), wrested it from the forces of Ptolemy IV. By the spring of 217 the Seleucid was in possession of the frontier-towns Gaza and Raphia (modern Rafa). At this point, however, to the astonishment of the world, Ptolemy IV., who was known as a hope-

less degenerate and voluptuary, met the Seleucid army of invasion about five miles from Raphia, on the side of the desert, with a well-trained army of Macedonians, Greeks, and native Egyptians, and in the battle of Raphia (described for us by Polybius) Antiochus was thrown back in rout upon Gaza. The evacuation of Palestine by the Seleucid forces, and its recovery by Egypt, followed.

About 200 B.C., after Ptolemy IV. had been succeeded by his infant son, Ptolemy V., Antiochus III. renewed the attempt, and by 199 his forces were again in possession of Palestine. And again at the end of 199 the province was recovered for Egypt by the Greek *condottiere* Scopas. In 198 Antiochus invaded the country in person, and near the sources of the Jordan, at a place called the Panion ("Temple of Pan"), the battle was fought which transferred Palestine finally from the Ptolemy to the Seleucid. Amongst the various communities of Palestine, the Jewish priestly state, occupying still only a small tract of country round Jerusalem, received the Seleucid king with open arms. On the other hand, the great Philistine city of Gaza stood staunchly by Ptolemy, and underwent a siege which ended in its being stormed by Antiochus. This siege of Gaza was reckoned one of the notable sieges of that age.

Thirty years later (170-169 B.C.), Egypt, now governed by eunuchs in the name of another boy-king, Ptolemy VI., started to reconquer the lost province. But the son of Antiochus "the Great," the eccentric Antiochus IV. (Epiphanes), was before

with them, crossed the dividing desert while the Egyptian army was still mobilizing, and met it close to Egypt.. He defeated it signally and invaded Lower Egypt. Alexandria held out against the Seleucid, and at the end of the year (169 B.C.) Antiochus withdrew his forces. Next year, however, he invaded the Egyptian Delta a second time, but again evacuated the country before the resolute countenance of a Roman ambassador. Palestine he retained.

XXVIII

THE GROWTH OF THE JEWISH STATE

WHILST, therefore, east and north and west the Seleucid Empire had been losing its outer provinces, one by one, to the south, by the acquisition of Palestine, it might register a gain. This gain, however, was not destined to remain long to it. But the enemy who soon after threatened the Seleucid possession of Palestine was not Egypt; it was actually the community of Jews gathered round their temple at Jerusalem. The policy of Antiochus Epiphanes, his attempt to Hellenize Jerusalem with a strong hand, and to convince the Jews that to worship himself came really to much the same thing as to worship Him whom they called the LORD, transformed this once pacific little community into a people of fierce warriors. The revolt of the Jews under the priestly Hasmonaean family, called

also the Maccabees,* began before the death of Antiochus Epiphanes (165-164 B.C.), and the struggle between this new power and the Seleucid government went on with varying fortunes under the succeeding reigns. The growing disorganization of the Seleucid monarchy gave the Jews their chance. In 152 one of the Hasmonæan brothers, Jonathan, was installed as High Priest—that is, as ruler of the people—in Jerusalem. Before 143 the Jews had acquired Joppa. In 142 king Demetrius II. renounced all right to claim tax or tribute from the Jewish state. In 141 the Seleucid garrison in the citadel of Jerusalem was got rid of, an event which for the Jews marked the beginning of full independence. In the same year they acquired Gezer (Gazara), commanding the road between Jerusalem and the sea. Between 129 and 108 the Jewish state pushed out its frontiers in all directions. It conquered Samaria, which had been transformed into a Greek city, and turned the water-courses over its site; and it got possession of Scythopolis (Old Testament Beth-shan) which commanded the road over the Jordan. It conquered from the Nabataean Arabs a tract of territory on the other side of the Jordan. To the south it conquered the Edomites (Idumæans), compelled them to embrace Judaism, and incorporated them in the Jewish state. In 104 the new Jewish High Priest, known as Judah at home, assumed in his dealings with foreign states

* The name Maccabæus (whatever it means) strictly was a surname of Judas only. It was only in later times that the name was used in the plural for the whole family.

the style of Aristobulus, King of the Jews. His contribution to the national expansion was the conquest of Galilee, whose heathen inhabitants were, like the Idumæans, compelled to become Jews—perhaps, for Christians, the most important thing done by the Hasmonæan dynasty. Under the successor of king Aristobulus, Alexander Jannæus (103-76 B.C.), the Jewish power extended over the whole of Palestine, as far as the Lake of Merom to the north. Hellenism all over this region went to ruin.

XXIX

THE CANDIDATES FOR THE INHERITANCE

THE Seleucid period, as has been said, was the third stage in the fight between Hellenism and Iranianism for Western Asia. And its characteristic was the gradual breaking up of the imperial Hellenistic dynasty. By the beginning of the last century B.C. it had given place in the country beyond the Euphrates to the new Iranian Power of Parthia; in the west and south of the old Empire the field was occupied by a multitude of independent Asiatic states, great and small—some under Iranian princes, like Cappadocia and Pontus, and perhaps Armenia; some under native princes, like the Bithynians and the Jews. This, however, was not such an absolute setback to Hellenism as might seem, since all these courts had been more or less themselves transformed to the Hellenistic type—the Jews, perhaps, in very

small measure, but the Pontic court, for instance, to a very large degree. Nothing was left to the house of Seleucus but Northern Syria and Cilicia, and over that last relic of their heritage a number of rival princes were wrangling in perpetual broils. The western end of the peninsula of Asia Minor had become a province of Rome.

It was fairly clear that this divided world might become the domain of some great Empire, but which of the Powers of the day came into consideration as candidates? We may say that they were four: the Iranian Power of Parthia; the Iranian Power of Armenia; the Iranian Power of Pontus, then under a king of immense enterprise and energy, Mithridates Eupator; and Rome.

At first it seemed as if Pontus and Armenia were to be the destined heirs of the country west of the Euphrates. Mithridates turned west. In 88 B.C. he occupied nearly the whole of Asia Minor. He overran the Roman province and put the resident Romans to the sword. The following year he flung his armies upon Greece. The campaigns of the Roman general Sulla made Mithridates give back, but the peace signed in 84 B.C. was an unstable peace, and left the Pontic king with great resources and in a position to renew the fight.

Simultaneously Tigranes of Armenia turned south. Before 83 he had, as has been mentioned, conquered Mesopotamia from the Parthians. In 83 the Armenian armies overflowed Syria, sweeping from before them the miserable quarrelling Seleucid princes. In Mesopotamia, Tigranes began to build

a vast new city to commemorate his name, to be a peer of Babylon and Nineveh, of Ecbatana and Seleucia. It was to be called Tigranocerta, and he dragged into it the populations of the Greek cities of Cilicia. In 69 B.C. the Armenian advance southwards had almost reached the frontiers of the Jewish kingdom. Tigranes was master of the Phœnician coast.

But now Rome had struck in powerfully. For 250 years non-Hellenic elements in Asia Minor had been winning back by a gradual and fluctuating process what Alexander had won in ten years. We may regard 73 B.C.—the year in which Lucius Lucullus destroyed the Pontic army near Cyzicus, on the Sea of Marmora—as the year in which this process of disintegration was definitely checked by the advance of Rome. The following year Lucullus invaded Pontus itself; Mithridates took refuge in the dominions of Tigranes. In 69 Lucullus attacked the Armenian king. He directed his march on the new city of Tigranocerta, and there won a brilliant victory over an Armenian army many times larger than his own. It was the end of the brief Armenian Empire.

Two years later Mithridates temporarily recovered Pontus, but in 66 the command of the Roman armies in the East was conferred upon Pompey. Mithridates was driven again from Pontus, and died a fugitive. Tigranes prostrated himself at Pompey's feet, and placed his diadem in the Roman's hands. He was allowed to continue to reign in the original petty kingdom of his ancestor Artaxias.

XXX.

ROME DIVIDES THE HERITAGE WITH PARTHIA

POMPEY made a new settlement of the East in the name of Rome. Some of it was to be divided into provinces under Roman governors, like the Roman province of "Asia," which had filled the place of the Attalid kingdom since 133 B.C. Bithynia, joined to the western half of Pontus, became a Roman province, and so did Syria. Other regions were left as principalities under client kings, like the Native States of India to-day. In Commagene, the highland country north of Syria between the Taurus Range and the Euphrates, with Samosata (modern Samsat) for its capital, one petty dynasty connected with the house of Seleucus in the female line continued till A.D. 72 (when it was deposed by the Roman Emperor) to bear the old famous names of Antiochus Epiphanes and Mithridates.

Rome came to Asia as Alexander's heir, as the champion and propagator of Hellenism. Rome counts, as far as Asia goes, as a Hellenistic power; Rome never tried to Latinize its Eastern provinces. As time went on, there were, of course, changes in the frontiers and shapes of the different divisions. Native kingdoms tended to lapse under direct Roman rule, as Galatia did, for instance, in 25 B.C., Judæa in A.D. 6 (though for three years later on, A.D. 41-44, it was again transiently part of a native state under Herod Agrippa I.—the Herod of

Acts xii.), Cappadocia in A.D. 17, and Commagene in A.D. 72; but we may describe this fourth (Roman) phase in the conflict between Hellenism and Iranianism, as a whole, by saying that what we now see is a relatively stable partition of the disputed area: Hellenism, embodied in Rome, remains solidly in possession of Asia west of the Euphrates and of Egypt; Iranianism remains equally firmly in possession of its native Irân. That state of things no efforts on either side are able substantially to alter till everything is changed by the coming in of a wholly new Power in the seventh century A.D.

XXXI

WARS BETWEEN ROME AND PARTHIA

WARS, of course, between the Roman and the Iranian Power went on with little intermission all through those centuries, and the frontier was now more to the east, and now more to the west. Babylonia and Mesopotamia were no longer the central provinces of one great Empire, but the debatable ground between two Empires. The first military clash between Rome and Parthia came even before the Western Republic had changed into a monarchy, and resulted in a disaster for Rome: an army under Crassus the Triumvir was annihilated in Mesopotamia by the Parthian cavalry near the old city of Charrân (B.C. 53). We heard of it in Assyrian times as the Holy City of the Moon-god

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Sin; now it had been transformed, like the other cities of Nearer Asia, into a Greek colony, and was called Carrhæ.

The story of all the wars that followed this, generation after generation, between the two Powers would be too long to tell here, even as much of them as is still known. Babylonia, the old land of Shinar, with its canals and gardens and fruitful fields, and its people now all speaking a form of Syriac, was regularly attached to Parthia. In fact, the capital of the Parthian kings was here; they had chosen a place called Ctesiphon, a sort of extension of Seleucia on the opposite (left) bank of the Tigris. Seleucia itself, a Greek city, would hardly have done for the residence of a court which still retained some of the manners of the Central Asiatic steppe. Perhaps Ctesiphon, its suburb, represented an old town of Babylonian days. The name is Greek, of course, but it is a Greek proper name for a *man*, and is as odd in the case of a town as James or George would be in English. It has been thought that perhaps Ctesiphon was in this case the transformation of the old native name, and its identification with the Casiphia of Ezra viii. 17 has been suggested. In any case Ctesiphon was the seat of the Parthian court; it was here that the Arsacid "King of kings" sat on his golden throne among his magnates, some of whom—the Suren, the Karen—held offices and titles hereditary in particular privileged families native to Irân or the Chorasmanian steppe beyond.

The standing cause of quarrel between Rome

and Parthia was Armenia. That country was always under some dynasty or other of its own, bearing Iranian names, and no doubt mainly Iranian in manners. But for the Roman Emperors it was a permanent principle of state that they must assert their suzerainty over Armenia, and maintain on the throne a prince upon whose fidelity to themselves they could rely. On the other hand, the ties of Armenia with Irân were close, and the kings of Irân always wanted to have their hand in the country. The different members of the princely families of Armenia were perpetually quarrelling amongst themselves, so that refugee claimants to the Armenian throne were not seldom found soliciting patronage in Rome or Ctesiphon, and either Power could put in its own candidate. This state of things naturally led to incessant wars.

Sometimes on one side or the other a leader, more able or more fortunate than the common, carried his arms far into the enemy's domain. Between 41 and 39 B.C. the Parthians overran Syria and a great part of Asia Minor. The Emperor Trajan in A.D. 115 took Mesopotamia from the Parthians and made it a Roman province, conquered the following year the old Assyrian country east of the Tigris, and then marched down the Tigris, took possession of Seleucia and Ctesiphon and the golden throne, and displayed the Roman eagles on the Persian Gulf. All the Land of the Two Rivers he annexed to Rome, and declared Parthia itself to be a vassal state. But the next

Emperor, Hadrian (A.D. 117-138), gave up all Trajan's conquests, and withdrew to the former frontier. Under Marcus Aurelius (161-180) the Romans again conquered Mesopotamia, took Seleucia and Ctesiphon, and penetrated into the Iranian plateau. Yet of these conquests they retained only Western Mesopotamia, which became a Roman province, Carrhæ being made a free town under Roman protection (A.D. 165). In the years A.D. 198 and 199 the Emperor Septimius Severus again led a Roman army through Mesopotamia, and took Seleucia and Ctesiphon for the third time. The whole of Mesopotamia (not Babylonia) as the result of these campaigns became a Roman province.

XXXII

THE PERSIAN SASANIAN DYNASTY .

SOME twenty-five years later a great change took place in Irân which intensified the estrangement between Irân and Rome. In the upland region to the south-west of Irân in which the Achæmenian dynasty had taken its rise—the land of the Persians proper (Fârs)—a man arose to claim the throne of Cyrus and Darius. He bore or assumed the old name of Artaxerxes (changed in the Persian of the day to Ardashir); his house is known in history by the name of his grandfather Sasan; he founded the third native dynasty which ruled over the Iranian plateau, the Sasanian. (It was probably in A.D. 223-

224 that he assumed the title of Great King.) The Arsacid house, with its nomad origin and its susceptibility of Hellenistic fashions, was swept away—only one branch of it continued to reign in Armenia—and its place was taken by a genuine Persian dynasty. The Sasanian dynasty was much more fiercely national than the Arsacid had been. Its princes were not as ready to admit the superior dignity of the Roman Cæsar. It was zealous for what it believed to be orthodox Zoroastrianism, and under its ægis the old religion was reduced to a firmer theological and ritual scheme. If under the Arsacids the Hellenism which Alexander had planted in his colonies all over Irân languished, under the Sasanians it disappeared.

The new Persian Great King demanded that the Western Power should give back to Irân the whole of Asia, and soon after 230 B.C. his forces overran Mesopotamia and penetrated into Syria and Cappadocia, where no Iranian conqueror had come since the Parthian invasion 270 years before. Yet the Romans were able to push back the Persians over the frontier and recover Mesopotamia. The second Sasanian king, Sapor, again drove the Romans out of Mesopotamia, captured the Roman Emperor himself, Valerian, who came to repel him (A.D. 260), and raided Cilicia and Cappadocia. Odænathus of Palmyra, the husband of the celebrated Zenobia, recovered Mesopotamia for Rome, and even threatened Ctesiphon itself. Mesopotamia was lost again a few years afterwards, and recovered by the Emperor Carus in 283. The Persians again got hold

of Mesopotamia in 296, and this time the Romans not only drove them out, but established a fortified position at Amida (Diârbekr) on the Tigris, near its source.

XXXIII

THE ROMAN EMPIRE BECOMES CHRISTIAN

SOON after this a change came over the Roman Empire even more momentous than the change which had come over Irân by the rise of the house of Sasan. A society which had come forth from amongst the Jewish people, a people which we have never seen in our survey great among the nations of the world, had been winning its way for the last two and a half centuries both in the Roman Empire and in Irân. The Roman government had made spasmodic attempts to suppress Christianity as dangerous to the state; the new Sasanian government persecuted the Christians as enemies of the Zoroastrian religion. Yet in A.D. 306 a man of Albanian stock, Constantine, was proclaimed Emperor in our British city of York, who made Christianity the dominant religion of the Roman world. The antagonism between Rome and Persia now became a religious antagonism on both sides.

This did not mean that the Roman world ceased to represent Hellenism. The Greek tradition still determined secular education. But Hellenism was henceforth fused with a new non-Hellenic element, whilst Christianity, on the other hand, had long

been interpenetrated by Hellenism. The dogmas of the Christian Church were expressed in terms borrowed from Greek philosophic phraseology. The peoples inhabiting the Nearer East before the coming of Alexander the Great had been ignorant of the great names of Yavana philosophy, and ignorant, outside the small Jewish community, of the name of Moses. But now from the Ægean to the Tigris the names of Aristotle and Moses were equally familiar everywhere, as representing two sorts of wisdom, the secular and the religious; to the name of Jesus an increasing majority of people bowed the knee, and the names of the old gods began to be forgotten. Irân, jealous for Zoroaster, did not want either Jesus or Moses or Aristotle. For the next three centuries the old Land of the Two Rivers was a land dividing the world which had found God in Jesus Christ and revered Aristotle as a master of human wisdom from the world which looked for a divine-human saviour, Saoshyant, in the age to come, and revered Zoroaster as the supreme prophet and sage.

Armenia, the debatable region between these two worlds, was won religiously for the Christian-Hellenistic civilization earlier than the Roman Empire itself. Curiously, the man who won Armenia for Christ was a member of the Arsacid royal race, Gregory the Illuminator; a few years, probably, before the accession of Constantine, Gregory baptized his kinsman king Tiridates II. of Armenia.

There was one respect, indeed, in which the spread of Christianity through the Eastern provinces

of the Roman Empire may seem to involve an assertion of the native element against Hellenism—that of language. From the days of Alexander the Great till the spread of Christianity, Greek was the only language in these countries which had literary prestige. In Asia Minor Greek seems to have supplanted the native languages even among the humbler class, though Phrygian survived here and there; but in Armenia, in Syria, and in Egypt, the old languages were still the common speech of the poor. Yet all educated people who aspired to literary distinction wrote in Greek. It was Christianity which brought back the native languages into wide use as literary languages; there grew up a Christian literature in Armenian and Syriac and Coptic. This was principally, no doubt, because Christianity was bound to provide spiritually for the poor, and had to translate the Bible and other religious works into the vernacular. But if in one way it was an assertion of the dignity of the native languages against the proud worldly prerogative of Greek, in another way it was an extension of the Hellenistic sphere. The works of theology which were translated into the vernaculars were, after all, largely constituted by Greek thought, and carried into a new vehicle Greek philosophical conceptions. Also, it was not only works of Christian theology which were translated, but there was an industrious translation of Greek classical literature, especially works of science, into Syriac. The school of Edessa in Mesopotamia was a chief centre of Syriac literary activity.

XXXIV

HELLENISM IN THE ROMAN EAST.

EVER since Rome had taken up the heritage of Alexander in Asia, Hellenism had been penetrating the country more deeply. No doubt the troublous conditions of Seleucid times had not been favourable to the expansion of Hellenistic city life, even though the earlier Seleucids founded numbers of cities over their Empire. The palmy days of the Greek cities of Asia Minor and Syria were the days of the Roman Empire. The remains of great buildings still to be found everywhere to-day in the interior of Asia Minor and Syria and Mesopotamia—the foundations and débris of temples and colonnades, theatres and baths, buried under mounds, or fabrics still standing in majestic ruin, as at Baalbek and Palmyra—belong almost all to the Roman age. They bear witness to the opulent and advanced life which once went on in these lands. Under Turkish rule these same lands have been for centuries a desolation, while in other lands that European civilization which they represented has gone forward to new developments of knowledge and power. The Greek literature produced in the Roman East had not, of course, the originality and freshness of the literature produced in the great creative centuries B.C. It was to a large extent imitative. Yet it was the work of an educated society in which the values contained in Hellenism were, if not increased, at

any rate handed on.. Amongst prominent names of Greek writers in the Roman age, a large proportion belong to the cities of Asia and Syria; we may mention Dio Chrysostom of Prusa (modern Brusa) in Bithynia (A.D. 40-115), and Lucian of Samosata (Samsat), on the Upper Euphrates, the writer of the strongest original quality in later Greek literature (A.D. 120-180). Lucian was a native Syrian, and did not learn Greek till he was nearly grown up.

When the Roman Empire became Christian, the Asiatic provinces continued to make a notable contribution to the products of the composite Hellenistic-Christian culture. Those of Syria and Mesopotamia took, as we saw, to writing in Syriac; but Asia Minor was the home of a long roll of Christian Fathers who used Greek as their mother-tongue—such as the three great Cappadocians, Gregory of Nazianzen (A.D. 329-389), Basil of Cæsarea (A.D. 329-379), and Gregory of Nyssa (A.D. 331-396). Asia Minor west of the Euphrates was in those days an important part of Christendom; the frontier which (in the cultural sense) divided Europe from Asia was not the Bosphorus, but the Euphrates or the Tigris. When European Christendom looks to-day at the desolation of these lands, it is looking at a lost piece of itself.

XXXV.

CHRISTIAN ROME AGAINST PERSIA

THERE were occasional wars between Persia and Christian Rome, though less frequent than those between Persia and pagan Rome. Mesopotamia was still Rome's frontier province; those rolling grasslands were held by ever new generations of the Imperial army against the Eastern enemy of Christ and of Rome. The idea of Rome, with its vast military tradition, still helped to nerve the legionaries who stood guard in the frontier fortresses, scanning the horizon in case they might see the glint of Persian spears coming on to invade. Yet Rome no longer meant for them the old Latin city on the Tiber, but the new Rome, the City of Constantine, on the Bosphorus, where a court speaking Greek surrounded a Christian monarch who was called Emperor of the Romans.

Of these wars, perhaps especial interest for us to-day attaches to the expedition of Julian against Persia in 363—Julian, in whom Paganism recaptured and held for one last moment the Imperial throne. Charrân in Mesopotamia remained a little island of Paganism in the Christian East; it could not give up the worship of the Moon which had given it prestige a thousand years before; and the last pagan Roman Emperor did homage in passing to this relic of a Paganism older than Rome.* Julian

* It is interesting to note that the Paganism of Charrân survived not only the conversion of the Empire to Christianity, but the coming of Islam. The Charranites were still

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moved down the Euphrates, and then advanced across Babylonia to the walls of Ctesiphon.

We may note that by this time there was no Seleucia any more. The Greek city had decayed out of existence under Sasanian kings. Where it had once stood was only a collection of mean houses, which was known by the name of Coche, a sort of suburb of the royal city on the opposite bank. But Babylonia was still a marvel of rich fruitfulness. One who went with Julian tells us of the corn-fields he saw, and the fruit-trees of many kinds, and the immense groves of palms reaching all the way to the Persian Gulf (Ammianus Marcellinus).

Julian did not stop to besiege Ctesiphon, but struck into the country east of the Tigris, the field in which British armies were operating in 1917 after the fall of Baghdad. There Julian died of a wound received in a skirmish with the Persians at a place

found to be star-worshippers under the Mohammedan khalifs. They obtained toleration in a curious way. The Prophet, in a passage of the Koran, had included with the Jews and Christians (who were to be dealt with more gently than the heathen) a sect called Sabians. It seems to have been a small semi-Christian Gnostic sect which soon after disappeared. Before long nobody knew who the Sabians were. Here, then, in the Koran was an order of toleration with no one to benefit by it. The Charranites saw their opportunity, and told the Mohammedan government that *they* were the Sabians, and that the injunction in the Koran applied to them. Hence in Mohammedan tradition the "Sabians" came to mean the star-worshippers of Charran. In modern European books the name "Sabians" is often confused with "Sabæans" (*i.e.*, the inhabitants of South-West Arabia, Sheba, Yemen), with which it has no connection at all. The initial S is quite a different sound and letter in the Semitic languages.

a day's march from Samarra. One result of this disaster was that Eastern Mesopotamia, with the strong city of Nisibis, which had been, with intervals, since 200 the mainstay of Roman frontier defence, was surrendered by Julian's successor to Persia.

After another war between the Emperor Theodosius II. and Persia (A.D. 422), in which the Romans failed to recover Nisibis, a peace of almost eighty years followed. In 428 Armenia was partitioned by treaty between the two Powers.

There was a beginning of fresh trouble when Justinian sat on the throne of Constantinople and the great Chosrau I. Nushirvan reigned in Persia. Again after 220 years the cities of Syria saw a Persian invading host. Antioch was stormed and set on fire. The population was in part massacred and in part transported to the Tigris (A.D. 540). After this, war dragged on for twenty years without leading in the end to any change of frontiers.

The time was close at hand when the intervention of an altogether new Power would bring the long contest of Rome and Persia to an end. It is curious that, like the old Assyrian Power, the Sasanian attained its largest extension only when it was on the verge of its final doom. In A.D. 603 Chosrau II. began another attack on the Roman Empire. In 611, Syria, with Antioch and the other Greek cities, was his. In 614 he conquered Palestine, taking Jerusalem, then a Christian, not a Jewish, city. In 616 the Persians were in Egypt, and pushed their conquest of Northern Africa as far as Tripoli. At the same time the Persian armies swept Asia

Minor; they reached the Bosphorus, and established a camp which only that narrow strip of water separated from the Imperial City on the European side. All these lands, which the Persians had never possessed since the Achæmenian Empire fell before Alexander 950 years before, once more were subject to an Iranian Great King. When the conflict between Hellas and Irân was opened at the end of the sixth century B.C., the Iranian had been in possession of all Western Asia, and it seemed that now, after eleven centuries of conflict, things had come back to their starting-point. The Western Power had been extruded, and the whole Empire of Cyrus and Darius recovered.

The counterstroke of Greek-Roman Christendom came a few years later. The Emperor Heraclius,* while the Persians were still encamped on the Asiatic shore opposite Constantinople, conveyed a force to Alexandretta (for the Romans had command of the sea), and cut the Persian line of communications by marching over the Taurus across Cappadocia to the Black Sea (A.D. 622). In 624 he brought another force by sea to join the Roman army at Trebizond, and struck across Armenia, by way of Tabriz, for the heart of the Persian monarchy. In 625 he threatened Casbin and Ispahan. The Persians had to recall their forces from Egypt and the Bosphorus. In 626 Heraclius returned by way

* How is this name to be pronounced? If we pronounce it as an old Greek pronounced it, the *i* is long—Heraclius (Herakleios); if we pronounce by accent, as the modern Greeks do, the accent is on the *a*, and the *i* is short—Heráclius.

of Mesopotamia and Cilicia, to Cappadocia, and thence to the hills at the eastern end of the Black Sea, where he took up a strong position. He issued forth for his third expedition in 627, and won a great victory over a Persian army near the site of Nineveh. Thence he pushed down the Tigris to near Ctesiphon, destroying on the way the great royal palace of Dastagerd (near Baghdad), and returned north to Tabriz. Soon after this Chosrau was assassinated by one of his sons, and a peace was concluded by which all the conquests of Chosrau returned to Rome. Apparently, no triumphs on either side could really change the *status quo* which had prevailed ever since Western Asia had been divided between Irân and Rome, with a frontier on the Euphrates or Tigris.

XXXVI

ARABIA INTERVENES

BUT now the new Power entered the field—Islam. It came from Arabia, the mother-country of the Semites, from which in the dawn of history tribes had gone forth to occupy Mesopotamia and Babylonia and Assyria. Since Cyrus had entered Babylon as conqueror (or, perhaps one ought to say, since the fall of Carthage), it might have seemed that the day of the Semite in the sphere of worldly power was over. From amongst one of their peoples, indeed, the religion had come forth which

had conquered the Roman Empire; but the dominion of the world seemed to have passed into the hands of Indo-Europeans, to be divided between Hellas-Rome and Irân. And now suddenly, after these centuries of inferiority, a Semitic people once more comes out of Arabia to subjugate lands and empires, differing in this from the Semitic invaders of long ago, that it has got its strength from faith in a new monotheistic creed.

The same Emperor Heraclius who had delivered Syria from the Persians had to see, a few years later, Syria taken from the Greek-Roman-Christian Empire by the Arab believers in the new Prophet (A.D. 632-638). In the next two years (639-640) Egypt was lost. Then it was the turn of Persia. The tide of Mohammedan invasion surged up on to the Iranian plateau. Not only was an end put to the Sasanian kingdom (641), but the old traditional religion of Persia was gradually suppressed. A few families faithful to the Zoroastrian creed still linger on to this day in Persia; a number later on found a refuge in India, where their descendants form the respectable commercial community of the Parsees.

A new Mohammedan empire came into existence of greater territorial reach even than that of Alexander; it stretched from Central Asia over Persia, Syria, and Egypt, all along North Africa into Spain.

The Greek-Roman-Christian Empire did not share the fate of its old rival Persia. It continued to exist. Between 668 and 675, and again between 716 and 718, the Mohammedan armies were under the walls of Constantinople, but they failed on each

occasion to take the city. The Empire retained possession of Asia Minor for some centuries still, and for a moment (A.D. 963-975) it even recovered Syria. It did not lose Asia Minor till that country was conquered by the Seljuk Turks at the time when the Normans were conquering England.

A great part of the earth, which Alexander had won for Hellenism, and Constantine had assigned to Christ, had passed under the new Semitic Power. To the Christian element in the Empire the new Power was not as alien as Zoroastrian Persia had been, for the religion of the new Power also had its roots in Judaism. After its conquests, it was not only in the lands of the Christian Empire that Moses was revered as a prophet, but from Central Asia to the Atlantic. And even the Man in whom Christians had recognized God manifest was after the Mohammedan conquest honoured as a prophet all over Irân. But for Aristotle the first followers of the Prophet who went forth to conquer had no use. The Hellenistic element in the Empire they trampled under their feet.

XXXVII

HELLENISM IN ISLAM

SOME persuasive writers, thinking of the spirit of the first Arabian conquerors, thinking perhaps, too, of the mythical story about Amrou's burning the Alexandrian library, and then looking at the modern East, from which the Hellenistic culture, which once

flourished there, has withered so utterly away, have said: "You see, all attempts to transfer 'Western' civilization to Asia necessarily fail; the East does not really care about the values of the West." This is not only to ignore the great history of Hellenism in Asia through all the centuries from Alexander to the Arab conquest, but to ignore the history of the East between the Arab conquest and to-day.

When great masses of primitive peoples are thrown upon old civilizations, as happened more than once in the time covered by this survey, the first effect is often to smother those civilizations, apparently to extinguish them. But if the old tradition is not entirely destroyed, it may be like piling fuel on a fire; the first effect may be, apparently, to smother the fire and put it out, but in time the fire works through the new material and the blaze is greater than before. That is what happened in the West. The Goths and Vandals and Franks and Saxons had no more use for the values of the old classical civilization than the Arabs had to start with; but in the end, from that apparent smothering, came the extraordinary development in human history which we call "Western civilization" to-day. What people forget is that the peoples of the Nearer East, after the Moham-medan conquest, showed a quicker susceptibility for the old Hellenistic civilization on its scientific side than the rude Northern races of Europe. The Arab race itself, indeed, continued, generally speaking, to regard the civilizations of the lands

it had conquered with the ignorant contempt of unlettered warriors; but the old populations of these lands, Syrian or Persian, after they had accepted Islam and learnt the Arabic speech of their masters, not only retained an interest in the thought and the science of Hellenism, but did new original work along the lines started by the Greeks, in centuries when our Western world had fallen into barbarian darkness.

The old land of Shinar, now called Irâk, was still illustrious among the countries of men in the days of the Abbasid Caliphate (founded A.D. 760)—“the golden prime of good Haroun Alraschid” (A.D. 786-809). After all the conquests and changes we have seen pass over it, it was still a great focus of population. Its canals were still tended; it was still a land of corn and palm-groves, and

“High-wall'd gardens, green and old.”

Babylon was gone, and Seleucia was gone; but, under the caliphs of the Abbasid dynasty, Baghdad, about thirty miles higher up the River Tigris than Seleucia, had taken their place (refounded by Mansur in A.D. 762). And the realm of which Baghdad was the capital was great, not only in riches and in power, but in culture—in Hellenistic culture. The people of the Land of the Two Rivers came to speak the Arabic of their masters in place of the Aramæan speech which, in one form or another, had been the language of the country since the days of Nebuchadnezzar. The old Greek books on

the different sciences—mathematics, astronomy, geography, zoology, botany, chemistry, grammar, logic—which had been translated into Syriac under the Christian Roman Empire, were retranslated into Arabic under the Mohammedan Caliphate. Aristotle, the Philosopher *par excellence*, just as Mohammed was the Prophet, was revered and studied in the Mohammedan lands from Central Asia to the Atlantic—was probably better understood in Balkh or Samarkand in the ninth century A.D. than anywhere at that time in Europe. The suggestion got from Greek books gave rise to an Arabic scientific and philosophical literature, much more advanced than anything which could be found in the West at that time, and nearer in character to what we now describe as “Western,” meaning rationalist and modern. This literature was, as has been said, produced for the most part, not by men of Arab stock, but by the Syrian or Persian Arabic-speaking descendants of the old people of the land. Yet it remains true that the conquest of the Syrian and Persian lands by the Arabs was found not to mean, in the end, a smothering of its intellectual life. Although the reigning dynasties might be Arab, and although the new religion spread over these lands was of Arabian origin, the Greek scientific interest did not perish, but was transfused into a new medium. As late as the eleventh century A.D., the great Avicenna prosecuted his scientific studies in the large library at Bokhara, and Biruni made researches into the specific weight of minerals at Khiva. Philosophic

thought, to which Greece had given the original impulse, played upon the traditional theology of Islam, just as it did in the West upon the doctrines of the Christian Church, and in the East, too, produced varieties of belief.

In the ninth and tenth centuries the Mohammedan East, which had the start of the Christian West, had made an advance in rationalist science which the West did not overtake till the Renaissance. How is it that during these latter centuries, while the West has gone on to so marvellous an expansion of science and power, the East has declined to the desolation and squalid incompetence of to-day ?

No doubt more than one cause contributed to this result. But it is to be noted that the decline of the East dates from the coming of the Mongol and the Turk. Central Asia continued, like a volcano, to throw out over the civilized countries of the East ever new streams of barbarian invasion, in such volume that they beat down the old humane life of these countries past chance of recovery. Europe lay farther off; the relics of the ancient culture, wedded with Christianity, had not here more barbarism thrown upon them than they could dominate and transform with time. The outer wash of the streams from Central Asia, like the Tartar invasions of Russia and the Turkish conquest of South-Eastern Europe, which at its furthest reach touched the walls of Vienna, left in the greater part of Europe the new Hellenistic-Christian civilization to continue its development undisturbed. In

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the Land of the Two Rivers the invasions of Hulagu and Timur did more than temporarily break up society. (Taking of Baghdad by Hulagu, A.D. 1258; by Timur, A.D. 1393.) They literally exterminated a large part of the population. We have followed for thousands of years the process of generations in this land. We have seen this people carry on its unbroken life through the ages. It has received from time to time accessions of new elements from outside; the blood it derived from Sumerians and Akkadians has been mixed with Syrian, and also to some extent with Greek and Arab. We have seen it change its speech more than once, and its religion and the name of its land. We have seen different alien masters bear rule over it. But always it has been there; the Land of the Two Rivers has been full of men. But now our story comes to an end. The people is not there any more. Some remnants of it fled to the neighbouring hills. Others doubtless remained in the few shrunk and decayed towns till the Arabs, drifting in from outside, absorbed them. Three-quarters of the land which had been under cultivation went back to steppe and desert and swamp. There were no hands to till it. Outside the squalid towns and the small strips of country, where a kind of cultivation still went on, the land was empty except for such Arab tribes as might maintain a nomad or semi-nomad existence in its monotonous spaces. The land seemed for the most part to have gone back to its primitive condition of thousands of years before, before ever the canals were dug by the men of

Sumer and Akkad. Only now in the midst of the desolation there were great mounds here and there, where once there had been cities of men and towers piled to heaven; and by the Tigris, flowing still from its northern hills, there stood on the site of Ctesiphon that vast and solitary ruin which had once been the magnificent palace of Persian kings.

In such condition the garden-land of Asia has lain for these latter centuries under Turkish rule. Those who have seen it have often, remembering its past, pronounced bitter judgments on that rule. Corrupt and slipshod; fraudulent and apathetic, that rule has unquestionably been, and its vices are perhaps inherent and incurable. Had a European Power, instead of a Turanian one, borne rule during these centuries in Western Asia, the Land of the Two Rivers, we may believe, would never have come to be what it is to-day. Yet it must be remembered that if the Turkish government had had the best will in the world, the enterprise of restoring the Land of the Two Rivers to its ancient productiveness is one which the Turkish government had not the means to accomplish. For it would have been no good to dig the old canals unless sufficient hands had been found to sow and reap. In antiquity the land of Shinar had perhaps (if one may argue from the analogy of Egypt) some seven million inhabitants; the present Arab population, of which a large part is semi-nomad, does not reach a million and a half. The problem constituted by the depopulation of the country—this lies

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between us now and the vision of a regenerated Babylonia, in which the ancient streams reflect once more mighty structures of men and gardens like Paradise, and in the streets of whose cities traffickers from all the earth once more meet.

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